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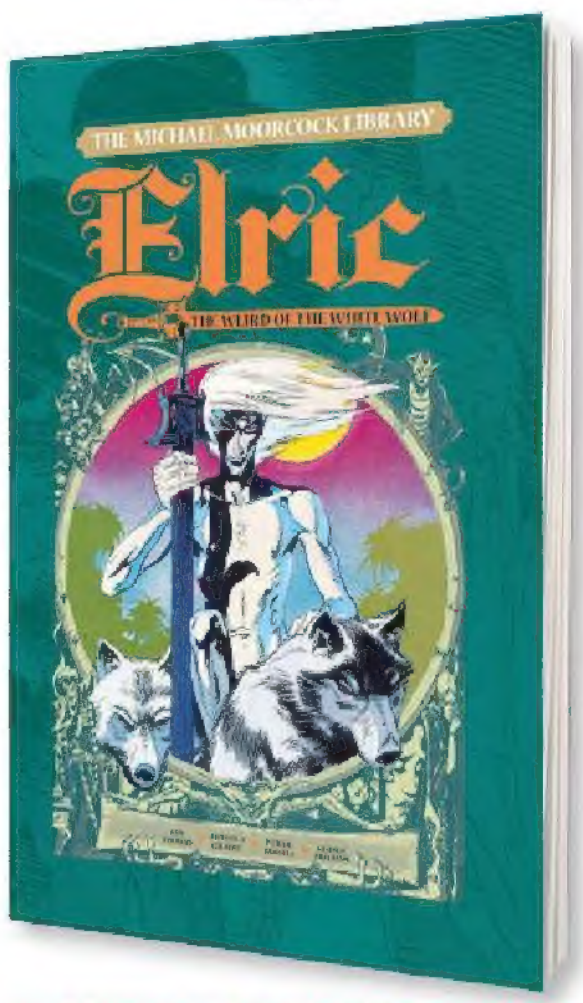

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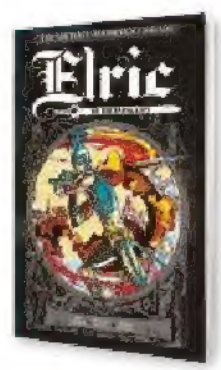

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Editor Will Salmon
Art Editor Andy Ounsted
Production Editor Alex Summersby
Cover Design Mike Brennan

CONTRIBUTORS
Carl Anka, Sam Ashurst, David Barnett, Abigail Chandler, Paul F Cockburn, Paul Gravett, Miles Hamer, Marc Jackson, Stephen Jewell, Stephen Kelly, Graham Kibble-White, Claire Lim, James Lovegrove, Kimberley Margaux, Leah Moore, Russell Sheath, Alasdair Stuart

COVER IMAGE
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Clark Bull, Megan Connor, Chris D'Lando, Aub Driver, Cara Fielder, Nigel Kitching, Rachel Kilbury, Mark Millar, Michael Molcher, Will O'Mullane, Alf Potter, James Roberts, Paul Smith

ADVERTISING
Commercial Sales Director Clare Dove
Advertising Sales Manager Simon Rawle
Director of Agency Sales Matt Downs
Head of Strategic Partnerships Clare Jonik
For advertising queries, please contact Steven Pyatt on 01225 687713

MARKETING
Marketing Executive Emma Clapp
Direct Marketing Campaign Manager Jemima Crow

CIRCULATION AND LICENSING
Senior Licensing & Syndication Manager Matt Ellis (0)1225 442244

PRODUCTION & DISTRIBUTION
Production Controller Vivienne Calvert
Head of Production UK & US Mark Constance
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LICENSING
International Director Matt Ellis, Tel +44 (0)1225 442244

THE SENIOR PARTNERS
Group Art Director Graham Dalzell
Editorial Director Paul Newman
Creative Director, Magazines Aaron Asadi
All email addresses are firstname.lastname@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
UK reader order line and enquiries 0844 848 2852
Overseas reader order line & enquiries +44 (0)1604 251 045
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Tel +44 (0)207 042 4000 (London) +44 (0)1225 442 244 (Bath)

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WELCOME!

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Happy new year! I hope you all had suitably festive break and I'm sure I'm not the only one who's glad to see the back of the year of despair that was 2016 (though at the time of writing I'm still living through it – please send help. Was *Doctor Who* any good?).

We're welcoming in the new year with a massive preview of some of the hottest new comics of 2017. From the most exciting superhero titles to the best creator-owned works, it should give you plenty of ideas for fresh new books to check out (incidentally, as a long time fan of *Strangers in Paradise*, I'm really digging Terry Moore's *Motor Girl*. It's not on the 2017 list, but is reviewed on page 120).

It's certainly going to be a big year for *2000 AD*. The legendary anthology turns 40 this year – and isn't it looking good for its age? We've run down some of our favourite moments, characters and series from the comic, starting on page 62.

Finally, we have a really interesting piece on the strange world of the Alpha Omega collection on page 102. Never heard of it? It's a fascinating tale, I think you'll agree. We'll be back here on **11 April**. I hope you'll join us again. Until then, be excellent to each other.

Will

Will Salmon, Editor

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OKAY, BUT JUST SO YOU KNOW, THIS KIND OF THING IS A REAL PAIN N THE ASS.
MAKING EVERY LITTLE PART OF YOUR BODY WORK AS METAL...
...THAT'S HEAVY MAGIC. LOTS OF THINGS COULD GO WRONG.
YOUR WISH IS MY COMMAND.
KZZZAP
YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS?
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DO IT, WIZORD. MAKE ME UNTOUCHABLE.

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HEAT VISION

THE HOTTEST NEWS FROM THE COMICS W

"EVEN IN THE FACE OF THE EVIDENCE, SHE MAKES THE DELIBERATE DECISION THAT SHE CAN AND WILL CHANGE THE WORLD FOR THE BETTER"

Above and far left: These pages from *The Unstoppable Wasp* #1 drawn by Elsa Charretier demonstrate the emphasis on fun and upbeat adventures as "she makes her way through the Marvel Universe with fresh eyes and bountiful optimism."

Left: Variant cover by Elizabeth Torque.

WASP FACTORY

Princeless author **Jeremy Whitley** tells **Stephen Jewell** about taking charge of Marvel's latest Young Avenger, Nadia Pym...

Move over, Riri Williams, Ironheart isn't the only new teenage superhero now flying solo in the Marvel universe. After debuting in last year's Free Comic Book Day issue, new Wasp Nadia Pym is branching off into her own monthly title, and with her intuitive aptitude for technology and troubled background, *The Unstoppable Wasp* shares much in common with the latest *Invincible Iron Man*.

"Nadia's strengths both as a hero and a person are her intelligence and optimism, as so often our modern perspective associates science and intelligence," says writer Jeremy Whitley, who is probably best known for his independent titles, notably *Princeless*. "But, partially because of her isolated upbringing, Nadia doesn't see things that way, as she sees both science and superheroes as these ultimate forces for good and advancement. Even in the face of evidence that superheroes sometimes fight and sometimes science is used for the wrong purposes, Nadia makes the deliberate decision that she can and will change the world for the better."

The daughter of the late Hank Pym's first wife Maria Trovaya, Nadia was raised in the Red Room in Russia, and also shares several aspects of her life with the Black Widow. "Her past in the Red Room is definitely going to be a big part of the series," says Whitley. "Beyond her being a spunky 16-year-old kid who knows 57 ways to kill you where you stand, she also has connections not just with Black Widow but also the Winter Soldier, who we see working at the facility where she was trained."

As we saw in *All-New All-Different Avengers* #14, which Whitley co-wrote with Mark Waid, Nadia's dark past in the Red Room will be coming back to haunt her. "We'll be dealing with some of the issues raised there, such as her citizenship," teases Whitley. "What we'll be seeing, though, is a new mission for Nadia that she'll make clear in the first issue. She wants to be a person that makes a real difference in the world, and not just as a reactive superhero. This is going to lead to her running afoul of both some old and new villains, as well as making a few new superpowered friends along the way, so we'll be seeing both Ms. Marvel and Mockingbird making cameos in #1."

While Tony Stark's relationship with Riri remains mysterious at present, former Wasp (and Hank Pym's second wife) Janet Van Dyne will definitely play an important role. "Janet makes a fascinating mentor for Nadia, because there is absolutely no way she can help her when it comes to science," explains Whitley. "But she is a master of the social skills Nadia lacks, and she also has a lot of experience dealing with obsessive geniuses."

Whitley is enjoying collaborating with French artist Elsa Charretier, who previously illustrated IDW's *The Infinite Loop* and DC's *Starfire*. "I love her character design, and she has a real gift for visual storytelling," Whitley says. "Her art is gorgeous, and it reminds me of the late, great Darwyn Cooke. Honestly, I couldn't have asked for anyone better to bring Nadia's world to life.

"We're creating some new characters within the book, so we're working pretty closely to make sure that they're amazing, as we know fans expect them to be. At least, Elsa and I are working as closely together as a writer and artist can when they're from opposite sides of the Atlantic Ocean."

The Unstoppable Wasp #1 is out now from Marvel. CH

NOT A REVAMP

Vampirella might not look the same as before, **Paul Cornell** and **Jimmy Broxton** tell **Stephen Jewell,** but don't call it a reboot. Everything you knew is still true...

Relaunching in February with a special low-price first issue, Vampirella is receiving a radical makeover thanks to the former *Knight and Squire* team of Paul Cornell and Jimmy Broxton. However, according to Cornell, the latest version of the alien vampire – created by Forrest J. Ackerman and Trina Robbins, first published by Warren in 1969 and licensed by Dynamite Entertainment since 2010 – is not a reimagining.

"We're saying that everything that has happened before is still true," says Cornell. "Vampirella is one of those characters who has been reinvented too many times, so it's about time somebody just dug in and put some growth into where she is right now. I actually think reinventing is sometimes rude to the previous creators, so I didn't want to do that – I wanted to bring a version that encompassed, summed up and moved forward without any rewriting."

However, Cornell was insistent that Vampi should receive a new costume. "I said that I didn't want the red bathing suit, because it looked great on the original version, where it was like a fun Halloween costume, but since then it's become a symbol of

macho ridiculousness," he claims. "We're basically giving her a couture look, and Jimmy is doing some wonderful work in all sorts of ways but notably in giving her a range of actual clothing."

Broxton designed her new costume to be very different to the more "gender neutral" feel of her most recent incarnation. "It's deliberately much more feminine and predominantly red, so it's a definite nod to her original look, just not so overtly sexualised," he says. "The idea is that she looks very chic, with a deliberate '60s flavour."

With the character renowned as one of the original so-called "Bad Girls," Cornell and Broxton were determined to make Vampirella more accessible to modern audiences. "I wanted to make her like a real person, which is the easiest thing to pump into any past character," he says. "The situation she is in helps tremendously because after sleeping for centuries, she's finds herself in either in a utopia or dystopia – depending on who you are – in the far future. She would quite like to get back home but now, since she's here, she's going to kick things in and stir things up. It gives a breadth to her, as there's a whole civilisation to bring crashing down, so she gets to be bad and deeply rebellious in that way. She's also got a really sarcastic, vaguely British tone of voice that I really like."

Opposite: Cornell and Broxton's Vampirella might look different, but they don't throw out all the character's history.

This page: After 1,000 years, Vampirella returns to find a world unlike anything she expects...

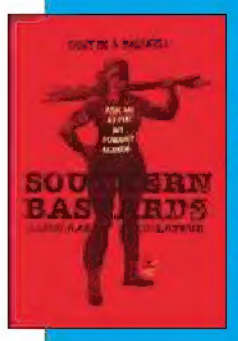
Cornell's vision of Vampirella also owes something to the Galaxy's Greatest Comic. "There's a little bit of a *2000 AD* vibe about it, an acerbic quality. I'm bringing out my inner Pat Mills," he laughs. "There's also a lot of jokes, so I hope that it's funny along the way with the darkness." CH

Vampirella #0 is published in February by Dynamite Entertainment

"REINVENTING IS RUDE TO PREVIOUS CREATORS, SO I DIDN'T DO THAT"

IN THE FRAME

ANNOUNCEMENTS, INFO AND NEW STUFF WORTH A LOOK



GOOD GUYS

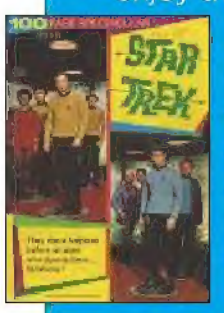
A variant cover of *Southern Bastards* #16 will benefit charity. Proceeds from the "Don't Be A Bastard" variant by co-creator Jason Latour will be split between the Southern Poverty Law Center and the ACLU. It's on sale 11 January.

WAR STORIES

If Marvel's constant expansion of the Star Wars universe hasn't left you satiated, you'll be pleased to note that the 1979-1984 newspaper strips are being reprinted in complete form for the first time ever in April. IDW will be publishing three volumes of the strip, including each Sunday title header and bonus panels, al beautifully restored.

GOLD MINING

Another 50th anniversary – enjoy the very first Star Trek comics again in IDW's *Star Trek Gold Key 100-Page Spectacular* in February. Rockets on full!



VALIANT GAMING

Remember the hit *Turok* and *Shadow Man* videogames from Acclaim? We might see games based on Valiant titles again: Valiant has signed a five-year deal with mobile gaming firm Big Viking Games.

VAMPIRELLA IMAGES COURTESY OF DYNAMITE ENTERTAINMENT

ROAD RAGE

Classic 1980s gamebook *Freeway Fighter* races on to the comics page in May...

Remember the Fighting Fantasy gamebook series of the '80s and '90s? Well, one of their most popular entries has been adapted into comics form and will be racing to publication in May.

Post-apocalyptic adventure *Freeway Fighter* is the tale of Bella De La Rosa. "She's a former racing driver who finds herself in the wastelands, driving to survive," says writer Andi Ewington (*Just Cause 3*), who is collaborating on the series with artist Simon Coleby (*2000 AD*) and original author and Fighting Fantasy co-creator Ian Livingstone.

Based on the 13th entry in the series, originally published in 1985, there's more than a hint of a certain Australian action movie in the story's DNA... "*Mad Max* proved there's an appetite for post-apocalyptic settings," says Ewington. "But where *Freeway Fighter* differs is at the heart of our story, with the focus on the car itself."

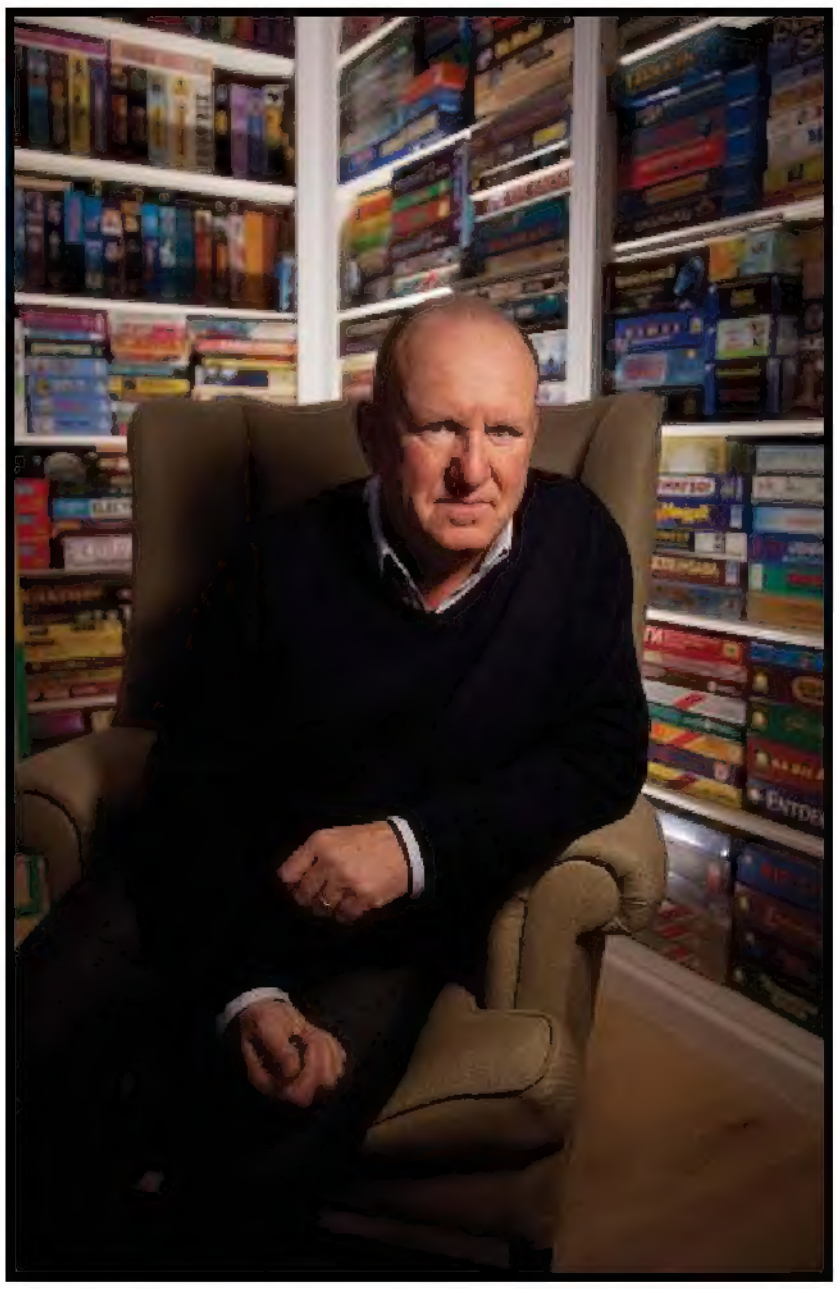
Fighting Fantasy books "consumed my life during the '80s," Ewington admits. "I had all the original editions with the colour spines before they went to the branded green spines." Over the intervening years, the books have taken on cult status. "They're books in which the reader is the hero," says Livingstone, who co-created the range with Steve Jackson. "It's an interactive experience, not passive like most books. Fighting Fantasy books empower the reader. They are different each time they are played, creating a very personal experience."

Simon Coleby came on board as a regular collaborator with Ewington.

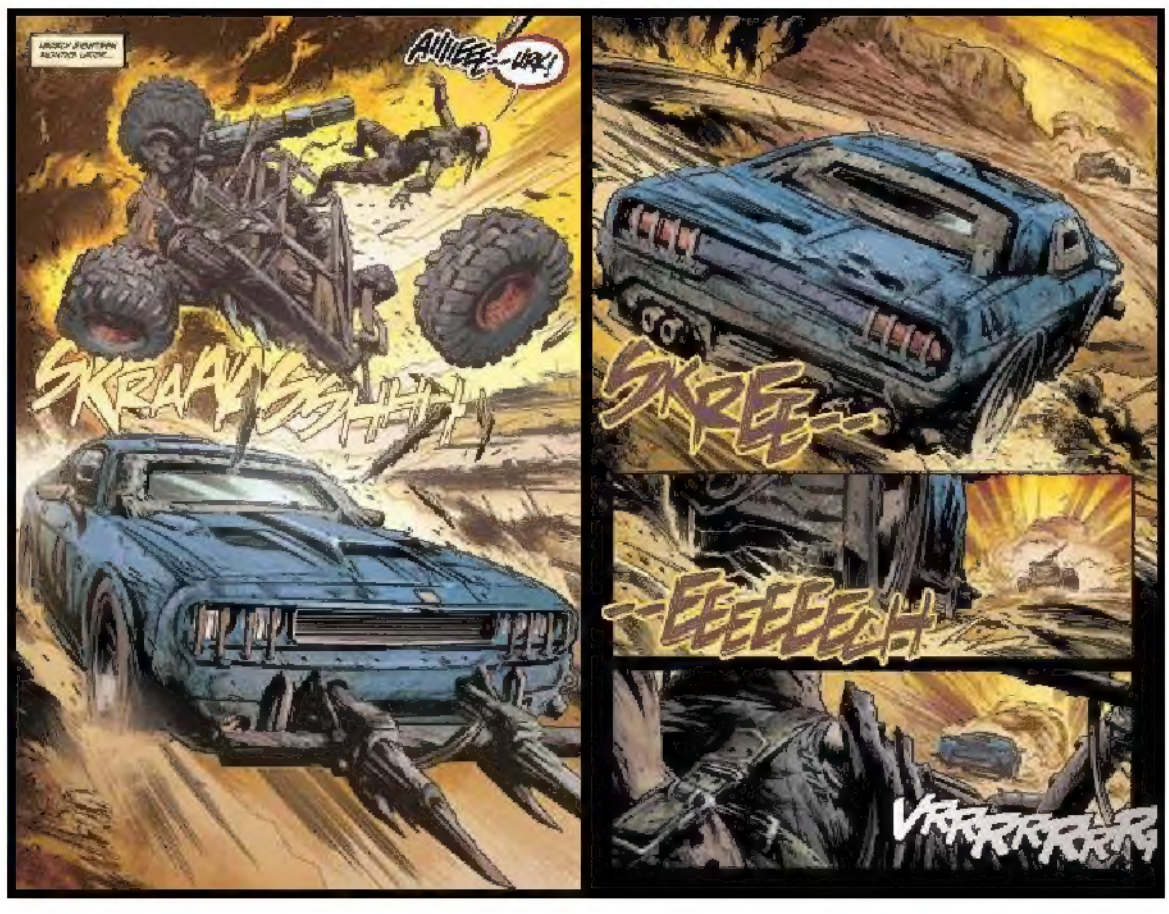
"Simon and I have worked together since 2014, on projects such as *Just Cause 3* and *Dark Souls II*," says Ewington. "His style is perfectly suited to the intricate internal pages found inside any of the Fighting Fantasy titles. I pitched Simon to Ian, who was on board from the moment he saw some of his awesome pages. He's a joy to work with and the panels he's been creating for *Freeway Fighter* are staggering."

And if the book is popular, there's the distinct possibility of more Fighting Fantasy books making their way to comics. "I already drafted a script for *Deathtrap Dungeon*, which is a personal favourite," reveals Ewington. "And I'm talking to Ian about possibly working on a story based on *Forest of Doom* or *City of Thieves*."

Freeway Fighter #1 is published by Titan Comics in May.



Right: The comics adaptation brings Fighting Fantasy co-creator Ian Livingstone's thrilling, immersive adventure to life in May.



"SHE FINDS HERSELF IN THE WASTELANDS, DRIVING TO SURVIVE"

CRYSTAL WORLD

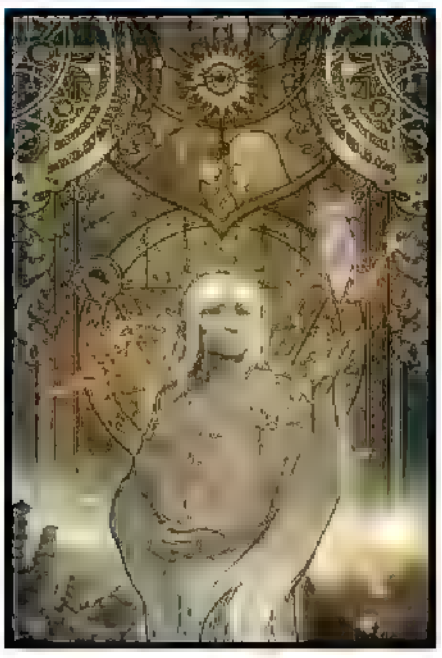
Simon Spurrier tells all about transforming the unfilmed sequel to *The Dark Crystal* into a comic...

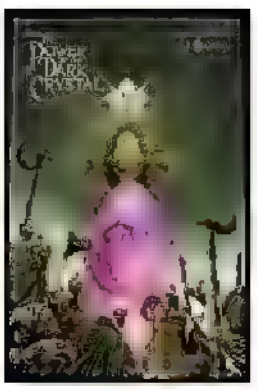
The sequel to fantasy classic *The Dark Crystal* has been a long time coming and when it does finally arrive, in February, it's not going to be on cinema screens. Instead, *The Power Of The Dark Crystal* will be a 12-issue series, adapted from the screenplay of the aborted film and published by Boom! Studios.

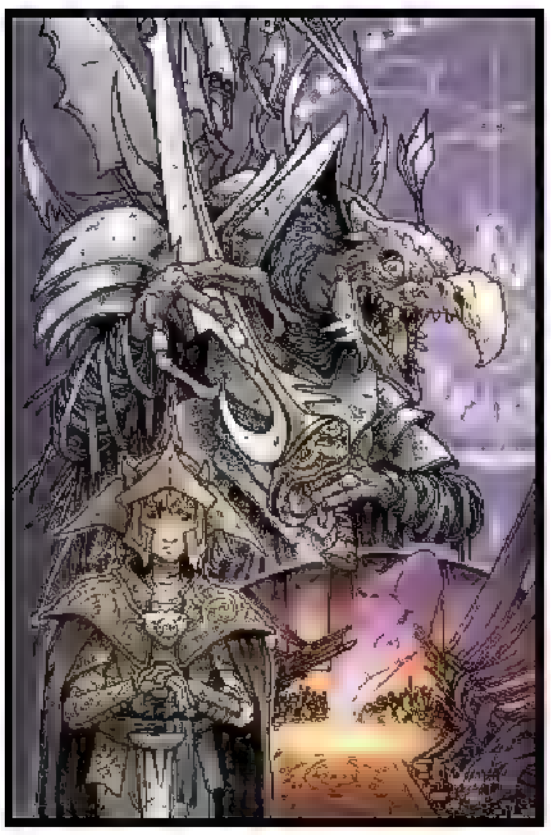
'I first saw *The Dark Crystal* when I was about 12 years old, and like a lot of people, all I remember is this sensation of horror," says *Cry Havoc* creator Si Spurrier, who is scripting the series. 'My parents bought it for me because they thought it was a kids' film but actually it's rather terrifying. So it was the moment I twigged that just because something is pure fantasy and comes purely from the imagination, it doesn't mean that it isn't very disturbing and grown up as well."

The sequel takes place decades after the original film and sees the world of Thra in turmoil once more, as Jen and Kira have become detached from their people. It's now up to a young fireling, Thurma, to save the day.

With Boom! subsidiary Archaia already The Jim Henson Company's 'go to for licences", having already released titles based on other Henson properties such *Labyrinth*, *The Storyteller* and *The Dark Crystal* itself, they were a natural home for David Odell, Annette Duffy and Craig Pearce's screenplay of *The Power Of The Dark Crystal*. That doesn't mean, however, that Spurrier was restricted or unable to put his own stamp upon the work.







Above and left: Several examples of the stunning, ornate artwork for the sequel including the cover for issue one, by Jae Lee and June Chung, directly above

'Rather than tweaking minor details of the story, it felt – for reasons that will hopefully become obvious in the final story – necessary to make a grand shift in the perspective from the front end and tell the whole story from the point of view of a particular character," he explains. 'In the first film, it was all about wonder, and the whole thing works best as a beautiful metaphor for childhood. So being able to find a way the ingredients of the screenplay and this sequel could be maintained, but to shift the perspective so that it approached the story and the world with a similar tone was critical for being involved in the project."

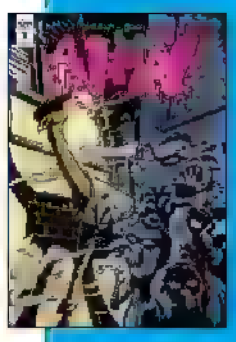
Describing artist Kelly and Nichole Matthews' work as "mindblowing", working on *The Power Of The Dark Crystal* has been rewarding for Spurrier. 'It's the first time that I've adapted something like this," he says. 'It's been a bit of a dream because I've kept all the elements that are already in the screenplay but have also added a bunch of new stuff as well as slightly tweaking the scope. I've slavishly stuck to all the best bits of the screenplay but otherwise they've let me fool around with the rest of it.

***The Power of the Dark Crystal* #1 will be available on 15 Feb from BOOM!.**

> **"PARENTS THINK IT'S A KIDS' FILM, BUT IT'S TERRIFYING"**

IN THE FRAME

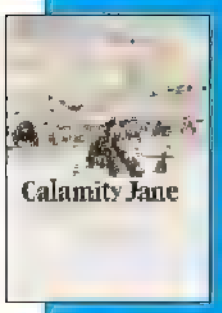
MORE WEE BITS AND BOBS THAT DIDN'T FIT ELSEWHERE



STEAMPORN

WAR BREAKS OUT

CALAMITOUS LIFE



THE DARK CRYSTAL IMAGES COURTESY BOOM STUDIOS

DITKO UNLEASHED

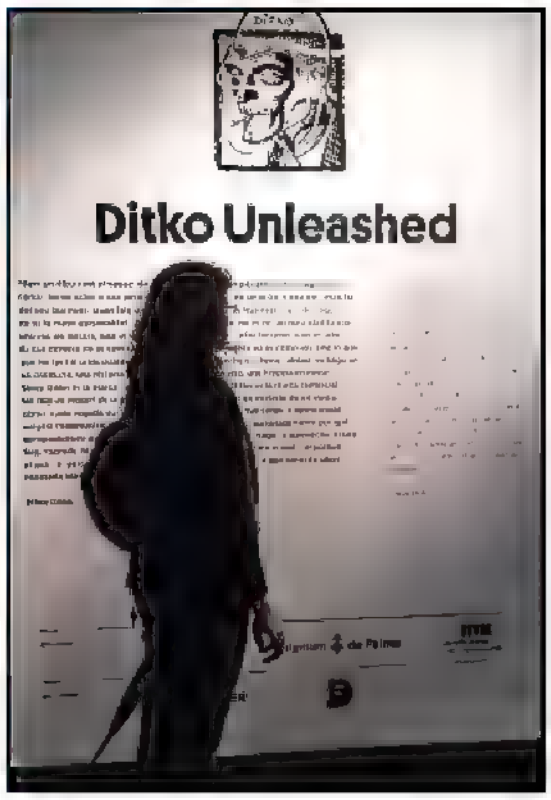
Paul Gravett visits Mallorca for the first major retrospective of the co-creator of Spider-Man and Doctor Strange

Ninety this year, the reclusive Steve Ditko has finally been given his first major exhibition, in the Casal Solleric art gallery in Palma, Mallorca. Ditko Unleashed closes on January 8th, but the sumptuous 368-page catalogue is available from IDW. Paul Gravett visited and interviewed co-curator Florentino Flórez.

Comic Heroes: What's the organising concept for *Ditko Unleashed*?
Florentino Flórez: We are showing 120 originals, 20 facsimiles and about 80 comic books. As we have limited space, we group them around his main heroes (Doctor Strange, Spider Man) and chronologically by the different stages in his career. In one room we present two complete Atlas stories, "A Monster Waits Outside" (1960) and ' Earth is Off Limits" (1963); in others, his spooky Charlton stories from the 1970s, or his later 1980s work for Marvel on Dracula, Iron Man and Rom.

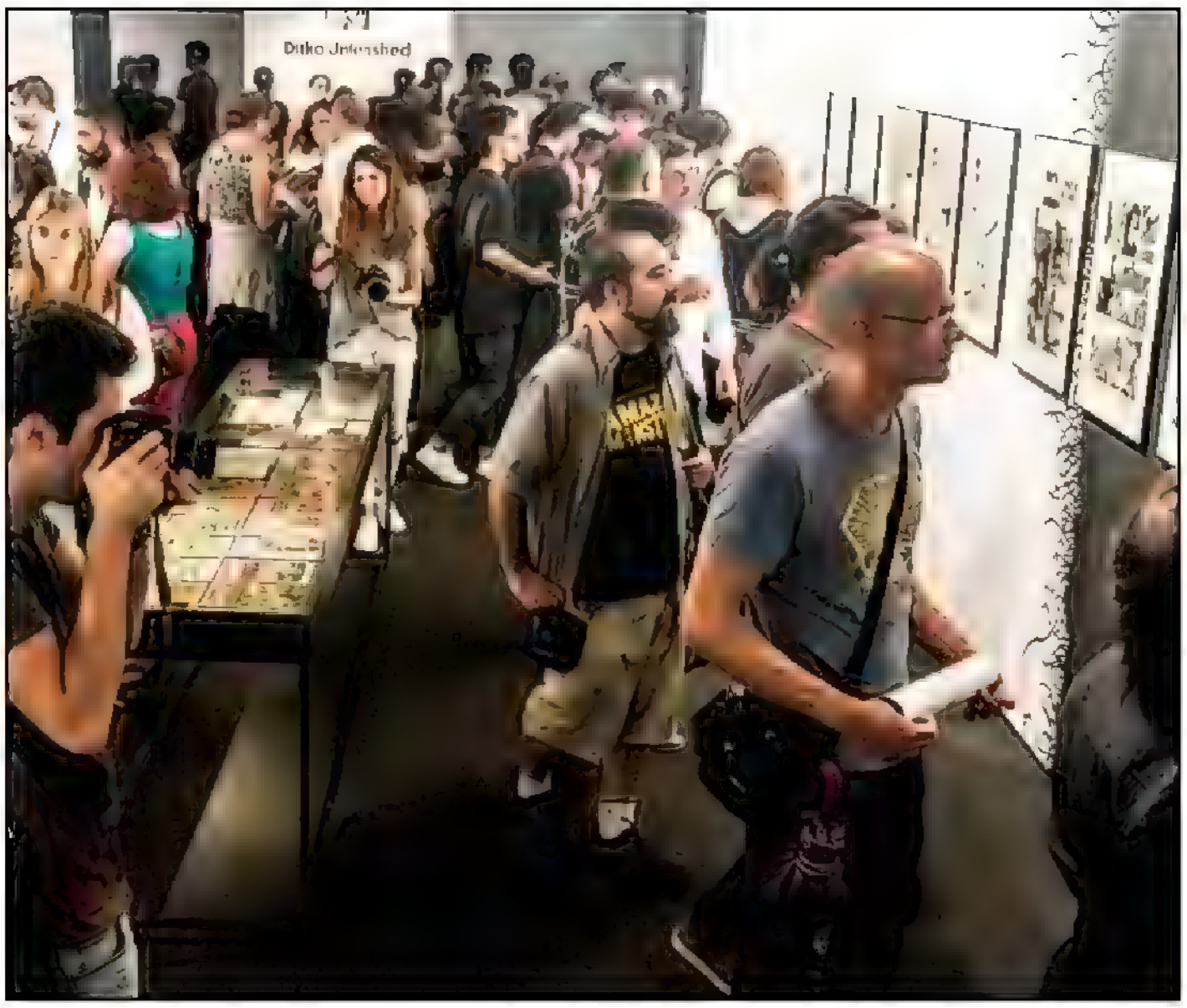
In the catalogue, we try to explain all the concepts Ditko explores in his comics and essays. These include his graphics, such as his interest in abstract forms, inking techniques and storytelling. Also his philosophical or political views, for example about the individual or freedom. He has a recurring interest in scapegoats and the need to have good principles. As he repeats: it's not enough to be against something, you need to stand up for the right things.

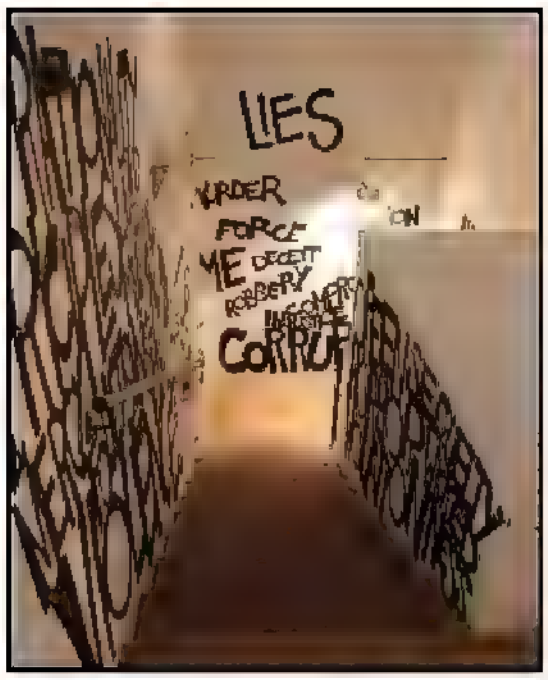
CH: What can we learn from seeing Ditko's originals up close?
FF: First, their size. Ditko always likes to work big and it's great to see very well known pages at their original large scale. Second, the quality of the lines. Ditko's fame as a great inker is well deserved. You can appreciate especially the fine lines he uses and the few occasions when he corrects his



Above: A visitor studies original *Spider Man* pages by Ditko including the famous sequence from issue 33

Right: Ditko explains his reclusiveness: "I'm not a performer. When I do a job, it's not my personality that I'm offering the readers but my art work."





PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF F. ORENTINO F. ORTEZ

mistakes with white out. In fact, he makes no mistakes! It's curious to compare those two Atlas stories, only a few years apart but such a big difference in inking style. Ditko was always trying new ways with the brush. And third, you can see his delicate washes on his horror stories for Warren's *Creepy* and *Eerie*.

CH: What are the most remarkable loans that you secured?
FF: I would mention two classic Charlton science fiction covers from the 1950s, and the famous sequence from *Amazing Spider Man* #33, where Spider Man doesn't give up and finally throws off the machinery that is crushing him. And of course, those beautiful Warren pages, including the complete story "The Spirit of the Thing" (*Creepy* #9). We also show facsimiles of the complete artwork from Spider Man's origin in *Amazing Fantasy* #15, currently deposited in the Library of Congress.

CH: What were your ideas behind the exhibition's striking decor?
FF: On the walls, we've painted different crosshatchings, letterings and textures characteristic of Ditko's work, and contrasted geometric and organic forms, because Ditko often switches between pure geometry and irregular forms. We've used only black or white to separate rooms or works. Black and white is one Ditko's favourite symbols, as used in his character Mr. A. You either choose white (good) or black (evil); he sees grey as the beginning of corruption. That might sound too strong, but there are practical cases where we have no doubt what is right or wrong. That is what Ditko reminds us. That is thinking in black and white. CH

> "DITKO'S FAME AS A GREAT INKER IS WELL DESERVED"

This page: The gallery is decorated with textures and shapes in black and white, reflecting both Ditko's use of geometric forms and his leaning towards Objectivism, with its black and white value system

ABOUT LEAH

Leah Moore is a writer of comics, prose and journalism, as well as the co-founder of the revolutionary *Electricomics*. She has written for *Action*, *Wild Girls*, *Tom Strong* and more. Follow her on Twitter at **@leahmoore**

The Medium is the Message

On Monday 28th of November, Marty Baron, Executive Editor of the *Washington Post*, was awarded the Hitchens Prize "for commitment to free expression, a depth of intellect, and an unwavering pursuit of the truth". In acceptance, he said that Donald Trump barred newspapers from his press conferences, issued personal threats on journalists and demonised The Press. He stated that in the face of that hatred, journalists should keep doing their job, because "Holding the most powerful to account is what we are supposed to do."

"I believe politics is something that comics does better than any other medium"

In 1988, I was ten. I remember my father talking about the book he was doing with Bill Sienkiewicz, Joyce Brabner and The Christic Institute called *Brought to Light: Thirty Years of Drug Smuggling, Arms Deals, and Covert Action*, which detailed the involvement of the CIA in the Vietnam war and the Iran Contra affair. I remember when the book was published, hearing the idea that the CIA might not like the book, and that perhaps he or maybe us, his family, might become targets.

In 1988 this didn't sound paranoid at all. The Thatcher government had unleashed brutality on striking miners, attacked LGBTQ people with Clause 28, and privatised almost all public services. Under Thatcher we also had a "special relationship" with retired pretend cowboy Ronald Reagan and the USA.

I was only ten, but I can remember my parents' conversations about these things, and more than that, I remember the cartoons and the comics.

Steve Bell captured spiky, swivel eyed Thatcher; children's author Raymond Briggs created *The Tin Pot Foreign General and the Old Iron Woman* about the Falklands war, and my parents published *AARGH!* protesting Clause 28. Kate Charlesworth and Claire Bretecher gave a voice to women who rejected 1970s gender roles and constraints on sexuality.

AUSCHWITZ WAS IN A TOWN CALLED OSWIECIM. BEFORE THE WAR I CAME OFTEN HERE TO SELL MY TEXTILES.
...AND NOW I CAME AGAIN.
(IF THEY BROUGHT YOU HERE, THEY'LL PUT YOU TO WORK-THEY'RE NOT READY TO KILL YOU YET.)
(WHAT ABOUT OUR WIVES AND OUR-)
SHUT UP, YIDS! TO THE BATH HOUSE. QUICK!

Spiegelman's *Maus* was revolutionary because it described The Holocaust better as a comic than it could ever have done as prose. *V for Vendetta* is ostensibly a dystopian fantasy, but when it was written, that world felt close enough to touch. *Swamp Thing* discussed ecological issues that were then possibly still preventable. *Watchmen* did not try to reinvent the medium, but to examine the symbols and ideas that mainstream comics relied on, to ask when Patriotism becomes Nationalism, or indeed Fascism. It questions whether Great Power brings Great Responsibility, as Spider-Man always taught us, or whether Dr Manhattan was a better symbol of a superpower, detached from the world and devoid of empathy.

Doing politics

The hyper-grimness of mainstream comics since the '80s would suggest that what the industry took away from the period was the darkness, when what it should have taken was the Intent.

The great comics I loved from that period were all inherently political, and I believe politics is something that comics does better than any other medium.

Since comics are a part of The Media, then they too have a responsibility to "hold the most powerful to account" as Marty Baron says, and indeed that has always been their role.

Since James Gillray dissected the Napoleonic wars and John Tenniel's *Punch* cartoons distilled the complexities of the world, since Dr Seuss drew Hitler and Mussolini or Giles showed the everyday lives of the working classes, comics have been and will always be political.

On 16th November 2016, Congressman John Lewis, Andrew Aydin and Nate Powell's book *March* made history when it became the first ever comic to win the National Book Award. *March* documents Congressman Lewis's first-hand experience of the civil rights movement in America.

Congressman Lewis said: "This book is for all of America. It is for all people, but especially young people, to understand the essence of the civil rights movement, to walk through the pages of history to learn about the philosophy and discipline of nonviolence, to be inspired to stand up, to speak out and to find a way to get in the way when they see something that is not right, not fair, not just."

Now, as we draw the aberration that was 2016 to a close, I propose that the statements of Congressman Lewis and Marty Baron are a gauntlet thrown down before comic creators, to respond to Trump, and to these times, with their art.

GOOD EVENING. "ONYON.
I WOULD ATTONIC MYSELF, BUT TRUTH TO TELL, I DO NOT HAVE A NAME.
NOW CAN CALL ME "V".
SINCE MANKIND'S PAWN, A HANDFUL OF OPPRESSORS HAVE ACCEPTED THE RESPONSIBILITY OVER OUR LIVES THAT WE SHOULD HAVE ACCEPTED FOR OURSELVES.
BY DOING SO, THEY TOOK OUR POWER.
BY DOING NOTHING, WE GAVE IT AWAY.
WE'VE SEEN WHERE THE S WAY LEADS. THROUGH CAMPS AND WARS, TOWARDS THE SLAUGHTERHOUSE.
IN ANOTHER WAY.
REPORTS OF MY DEATH WERE...
...EXAGGERATED.
TOMORROW, DOWNING STREET WILL BE RESTORED. THE HEAD REDUCED TO RUINS. AN END TO WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE.
TONIGHT, YOU MUST CHOOSE WHAT COMES NEXT. LIVES OF OUR OWN, OR A RETURN TO CHAINS.
CHOOSE CAREFULLY.
WITH ANARCHY FROM RUBBLE COMES NEW HOPE. IT IS INSPIRATIONAL. THEY SAY ANARCHY'S DEAD, BUT SEE I...
AND SO, ADIEU.

KA-PUNCH! A COMIC BY MARC JACKSON

WALLY! HOW'S THE SUPER-HERO BUSINESS GOING?
HEY DONALD.
TO BE HONEST, PRETTY SUCKY.
FOR REAL, HOW COME?
I'M STARTING TO REALISE THAT WITH GREAT POWER...
...COMES A WHOLE LOTTA HASSLE!!!

"ALL I DO IS BATTLE ROBO-LOONIES WANTING TO TRASH BIG CITY"
"OR FREAKS IN RUBBER MASKS, WHO REALLY SHOULD KNOW BETTER!"
IT'S SOOOO BORING!
I DON'T HAVE TIME TO DO THE IMPORTANT STUFF ANYMORE...
...LIKE PLAYING VIDEO GAMES OR EATING CEREAL!
SHEESH! THAT SUCKS! SO WHAT ARE YOU GOING TO DO?
WELL... I COULD ASK GENE, THE SPACE-GENIE TO GIVE MY POWERS TO SOMEONE ELSE.
OOOOOOOH! HOW ABOUT ME?
REALLY? EVEN AFTER EVERYTHING I JUST TOLD YOU?
SURE, I'LL TAKE A SHOT!!
HEY, GENE!!
HEY LITTLE DUDE! WHADDAYA NEED, YOU'RE NOT HUNGRY ARE YOU?
NAAHH GENE... IT'S BEEN GREAT HAVING SUPER-POWERS, BUT I'D LIKE A REST FROM BEING A HERO.
POP!
COULD YOU GIVE MY COSMIC PUNCH-POWERS TO MY BUDDY, DONALD?
NO PROBLEMO LITTLE DUDE. WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN?
COOL!
GLERP!

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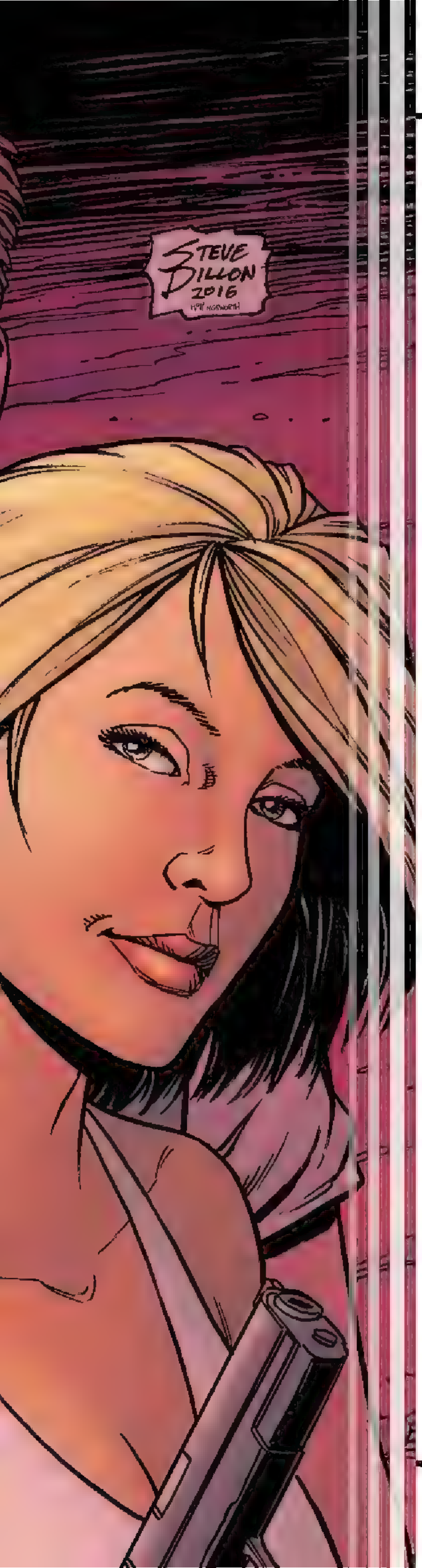


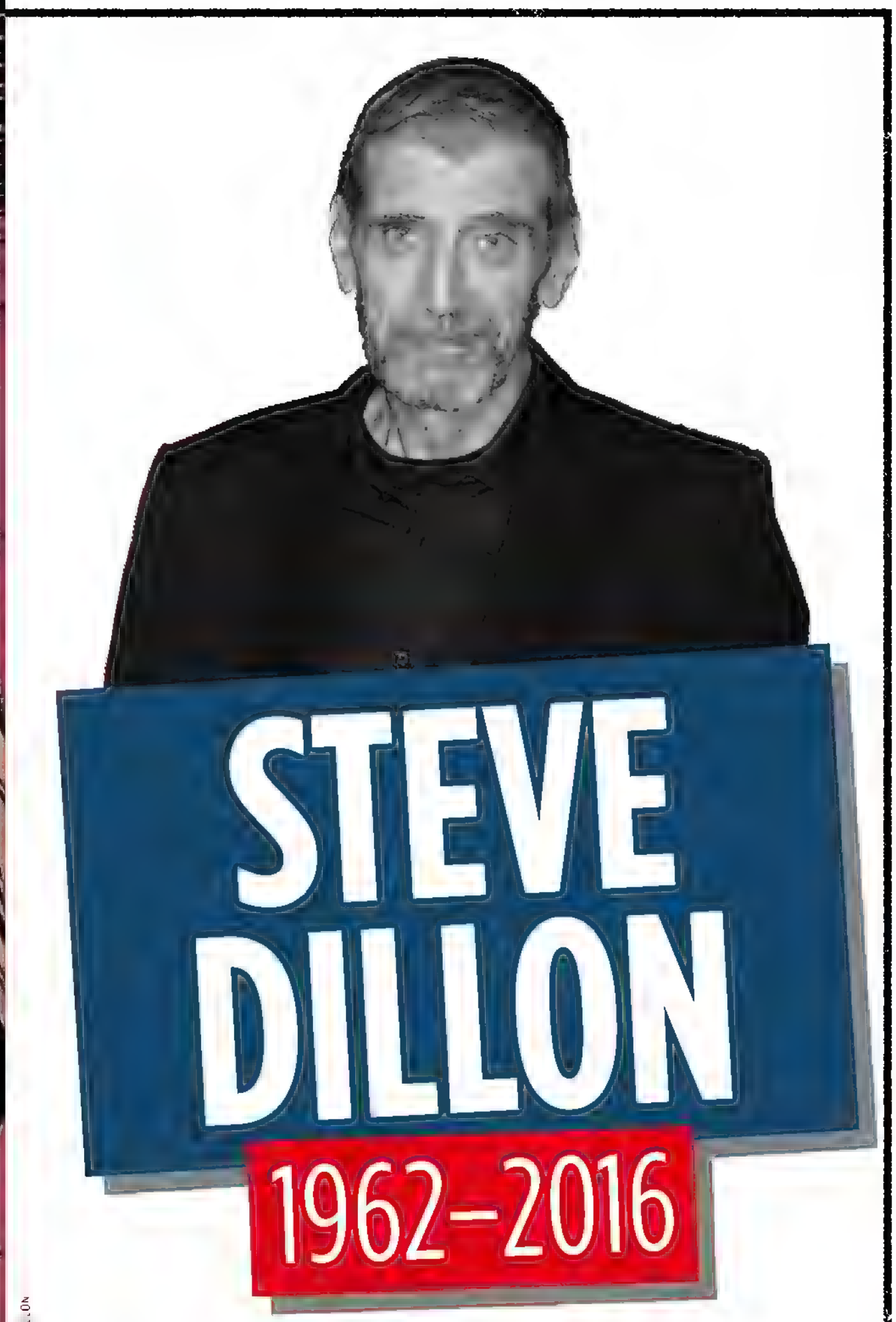
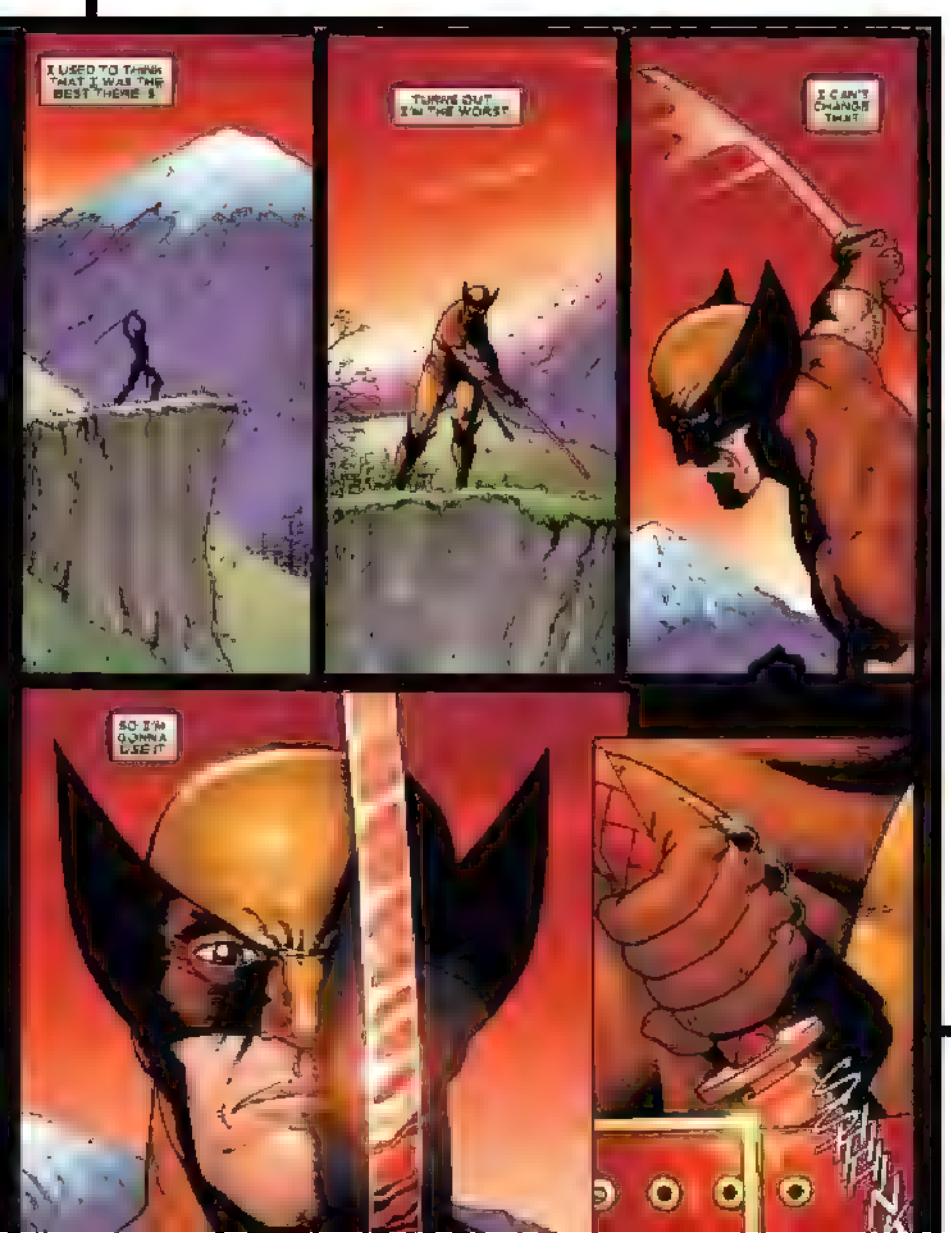


IMAGE COURTESY DC COMICS PREACHER © GARTH ENNIS & STEVE DILLON

David Barnett pays tribute to a British artist who, over four glorious decades, co-created or defined the look of iconic characters and became a mainstay of the industry on both sides of the Atlantic >

JUDGE DREDD
ALONE IN A CROWD!
HOPE THEY DON'T PICK ON ME NEXT!
FOR PITY'S SAKE, HELP ME!
THEY'RE FINISHING HIM OFF! LOOK AWAY! FOR HEAVEN'S SAKE, DON'T ATTRACT THEIR ATTENTION
AAAGHH...
2000AD Credit Card:
COMPU-TRON
NOT ME NEXT! PLEASE, NOT ME!
HELP! THEY'RE ROBBING ME!
THANK GOD THEY'VE GONE FOR THE GUY IN THE BALCONY!
AAAAAAAAKH
SOMEBODY HELP MEEEEE!
YOU'VE GOT TO BE JOKING, PAL! WHY SHOULD I HELP YOU? I DON'T WANT TROUBLE!

There are few artists who encompass and epitomise the comics industry as a whole in the past 40 years as much as Steve Dillon, who has died at the age of 54. From the glory days of Marvel UK, to the indie comics explosion of the late '80s, from seminal British weekly *2000 AD* to some of the most iconic characters in American comics, from the ground-breaking *Warrior* to the Vertigo masterpiece *Preacher*, Steve Dillon is perhaps the quintessential comic book artist of the modern day.



Dillon's death was announced on social media by his younger brother Glyn, himself a renowned artist, who said simply that Dillon had died in New York, "the city he loved", and that "my big brother and my hero" would be "sorely missed". He had been in the city for Comic Con in October.

It is a tragically young end for an artist who was constantly pushing himself to be at the top of his game and whose work was rightfully in the spotlight thanks to the TV adaptation of *Preacher*, the long running Vertigo series he created with writer Garth Ennis.

In the days after Dillon's death, Garth Ennis wrote a moving tribute on his Facebook page in which he recalled the man he had first met in 1989, who became a lifelong friend. Dillon was even best man at Ennis's wedding.

Ennis recalled what he termed "two decades of brilliant artistic collaboration", saying that Dillon "took whatever lunacy I threw at him and made it work flawlessly, every single time".

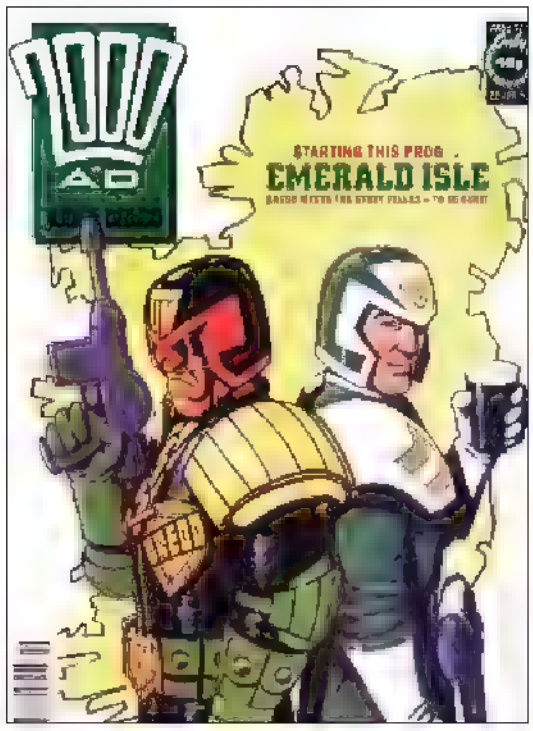
Ennis also wrote that he had seen Steve just before he died in New York, "walking down Fifth Avenue to his hotel after saying goodnight outside Foley's. It could have been the end of any one of a thousand nights. It's not a bad memory to have."

EARLY OPPORTUNITY

Steve Dillon was born on 22 March 1962 in London, and raised in Luton, Bedfordshire. It was while at school that he first discovered his talent for drawing, creating with school friends a science fiction comic book while barely a teenager.

In fact, Dillon was apparently just 16 when he got his first professional gig, drawing a strip

JUDGE DREDD IMAGES © REBELLION. ON WOLVERINE & DEADPOOL, IMAGES © MARVEL.



featuring none other than the Hulk for Marvel UK's weekly comic title starring the jolly green giant. This was a rare time for Marvel UK, under the stewardship of Dez Skinn, because the UK weeklies had a short but glorious season originating their own strips featuring Marvel characters rather than just reprinting US Marvel comics sliced up into five or six page weekly instalments, as had been traditional.

This gave a window of opportunity for new British talents to get their work in front of a wide audience, and their creative hands on some of the best known and best loved properties from the House of Ideas. After drawing the Hulk, Dillon also went on to provide art for a home grown Nick Fury series for the comic.

Dillon really established his burgeoning reputation with the advent of *Doctor Who Weekly* in 1980, for which he provided artwork for a number of comic strips, beginning with a soulful tale about a Cyberman with emotions. But Dillon's enduring legacy from the *Doctor Who* years would have to be Abslom Daak, the character he created with Steve Moore. Daak was a pony tailed criminal given one last shot at redemption, earning his freedom by turning Dalek Killer. The character proved instantly popular and featured in several more adventures.

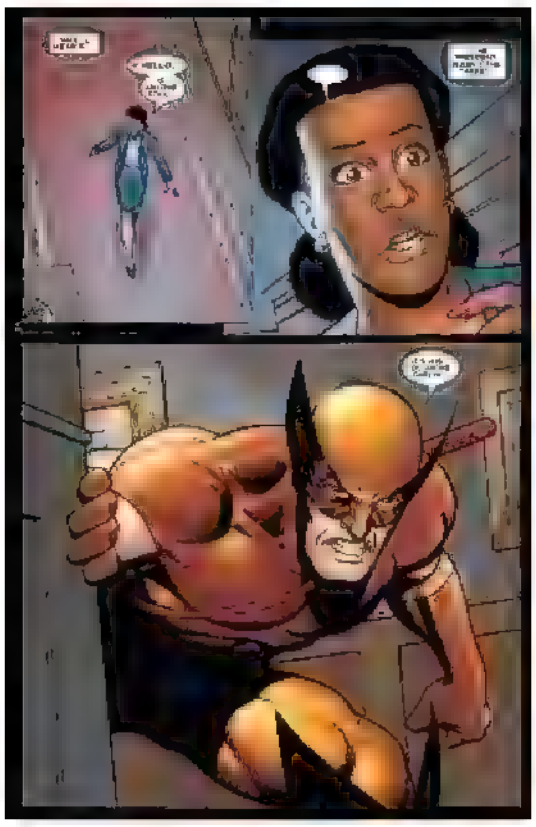
In the early 1980s Dillon was involved in another Dez Skinn project. Post Marvel, Skinn set up his own publishing company, Quality Communications, and put out the pioneering *Warrior* comic magazine, which gave the world Alan Moore's Marvelman and V For Vendetta, plus the amazing Laser Eraser and Pressbutton. Writing credits went to one "Pedro Henry" - actually Dillon's collaborator on Abslom Daak, Steve Moore, who had created the >

FRANCE:
WHAT...
...YOU THINK I DID?!
YES.
I'VE KEPT TABS ON YOU FOR YEARS WADE.
DECADES.
OSCAR ZERO. WEAPON X...
YOU WERE A PART OF THAT?
NO.
BUT I KNOW ALL ABOUT THEM AND I KNOW THAT, IN BOTH CASES...

This page and opposite: Steve Dillon's art graced top flight characters in the UK and the US, from Judge Dredd and Rogue Trooper to Wolverine and more

DESERTER

HE NEVER WENT ANYWHERE.



ROGUE TROOPER MAGES © REBELLION & WOLVERINE & PUNISHER MAGES © MARVEL

psychotic cyborg Axel Pressbutton along with Alan Moore for the music magazine *Sounds* in 1980.

Dez Skinn, in his own social media tribute to Dillon, made mention of the fact that he had employed Dillon for his first comics job at such a young age, writing: "By accepting my contract, the downside was he did miss out on the university joys of discovering pubs, pool, and persons of the opposite sex, with him opting to begin his full time comics career aged a tender 16.

"But my faith in his ability was such that within his first six months I had him competing with artists three times his age, drawing The Hulk, Nick Fury Agent of SHIELD, Ant Man and the cult anti hero Abslom Daak for *Doctor Who Weekly*.

"And after Marvel, he was a mainstay at our Soho design studio [where we certainly did find time to socialise and I was able to help him make up for what he'd missed in his teenage years]."

It was perhaps inevitable that Dillon would find work at *2000 AD*, which he did from the early 1980s, mingled in with his work on *Warrior* magazine.

Dillon became a mainstay of *2000 AD* in its early glory years, having found its feet and become established after its arrival on the comics scene in 1977. During his time working for *2000 AD*, Dillon drew the strips Mean Arena, Ro Busters, Bad Company, ABC Warriors, Tyranny Rex and, of course, Judge Dredd.

Dillon's Dredd stories were legendary... and not always just because of the artwork. There's one classic anecdote about Dillon's artwork for the story in prog 404 in 1985, which went missing just before the comic went to press, forcing Dillon to reproduce the whole episode from scratch over an entire weekend.

DEADLINE DOOM

In a blog post shortly after Dillon's death, *2000 AD* staff revealed exactly what had happened to Dillon's missing artwork: he had left it in the pub.

Artist and writer John Higgins said that Dillon and veteran *2000 AD* letterer Tom Frame had finished the story on a Thursday and intended to drop it off at the comic's editorial offices on Friday, in readiness for a Monday print, and decided to go to the pub. Dillon woke up the next morning without his portfolio, and had to pull out all the stops to get the artwork redone in time for Monday... only to find out after he'd delivered the new artwork that his portfolio was being kept safe for him behind the bar of the pub he'd been out in.

AIN'T YOU THE PUNISHER?
YEAH.
SO...
UH
YOU'RE CHARLIE SCHMITT, SOLDIER N' PETE ALLENDY'S CREW
ALSO THE LAST SURVIVING MEMBER OF THE GNUCCI OUTFIT
UM, YEAH THAT'S TRUE AS A MATTER OF FACT I WAS IN THE HOSPITAL THAT WHOLE SUMMER I FELL DOWN SOME STAIRS AN' BROKE MY PELVIS.
THAT'S HOW COME I WASN'T AROUND WHEN... WELL WHERE...
HEY I GUESS I DON'T GOTTA TELL YOU WHAT HAPPENED TO 'EM RIGHT?
SO WHAT'D YOU?
SAW YOUR FRIEND WALK YOU OUT OF ALLENDY'S FIGURED YOU COULD USE A HAND
WANT ME TO DROP YOU AT YOUR PLACE?
WHAT? F-
I MEAN NO! WAIT A MINUTE, I CAN'T GO HOME I CAN'T NEVER GO HOME AGAIN
NOT AFTER THE THING AT THE ZOO

Above: In the US, along with Hellblazer and Preacher at DC, Dillon is best known for his authoritative work on Marvel's Punisher in a range of titles over a number of years

By the late 1980s the comics landscape had changed completely; British artists and >

> **"THE ARTWORK WENT MISSING, SO DILLON REDREW THE WHOLE STORY OVER A WEEKEND"**

DANGER! GENIUS AT WORK!
THEOPHILUS PRITT, YOU ARE CHARGED WITH THE BREAKING OF THIS OUR MOST SACRED LAW. YOU HAVE COMMITTED WEIGHT CRIMES, DRESS CRIMES AND INTELLIGENCE CRIMES, WILFULLY THREATENING THE STABILITY OF OUR SOCIETY.
HOW DO YOU PLEAD?
ALL MEN ARE EQUAL
I PLEAD INTELLIGENCE!
DON'T TRY TO GET CLEVER WITH ME, PRITT!
I CAN'T HELP IT, I'M A GENIUS
"GENIUSES. THEY MAKE ME SICK! AND THIS BUY WAS ONE OF THE WORST WE'D EVER PULLED IN!
"MY NAME'S TERRY I'M AN OFFICER IN THE MORALITY POLICE
GOODAD Credit Cards
IT'S OUR JOB TO MAKE SURE CREEPS LIKE PRITT GET WHAT'S COMING TO THEM. THE CASE STARTED LAST GOODDAY WITH AN URGENT BULLETIN ..."
WHARP! WHARP!
GRADE A INTELLIGENCE CRIME!
LET'S GO!
IT'S THOSE TRAFFIC LIGHTS OFFICER. THEY'VE BEEN PUT THERE OVERNIGHT I CALLED YOU STRAIGHT AWAY
JUST AS WELL YOU DID. YOU LOOK A LITTLE OVERWEIGHT.
CHARGE HIM, TERRY.
LET'S SEE WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT THESE LIGHTS...
DISGUST NG! THEY'RE DESIGNED SO THAT YOU CAN ACTUALLY GET ACROSS THE ROAD BEFORE THEY CHANGE COLOUR!
BUT THAT IS A GREAT IDEA! I ALWAYS GET CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE.
WHAT DID YOU SAY, TERRY?
UH.. FORGET IT..
TERRY
OKAY, LET'S GET TH & STUFF DISMANTLED.
"I WAS WORRIED. FOR MONTHS WE'D BEEN FINDING SIMILAR EVIDENCE OF GENIUS AT WORK. DESIGNS FOR PERPETUAL MOTION TOASTERS, HEDGEHOG TUNNELS UNDER THE FREEWAY
"AN ALARM CLOCK THAT WAITED TILL THE GOOD BIT OF YOUR DREAM WAS OVER BEFORE WAKING YOU UP.
"THE PERPETRATOR WAS SMART, ALL RIGHT BUT SOONER OR LATER HE HAD TO MAKE A MISTAKE ..."

writers who had cut their teeth on Marvel UK, *Warrior* and *2000 AD* – creators such as Alan Moore, Grant Morrison, Dave Gibbons – were shaking up the American comics scene. Dillon would also be part of this British Invasion, but first he had something else to do in the UK: *Deadline*.

Deadline was launched in 1988 on a wave of indie music, a more socially and politically aware youth, and a reappraisal of comic books, especially by the mainstream. *Deadline* was created by Dillon and his fellow *2000 AD* artist Brett Ewins, and had a fresh, punk ish and decidedly cool feel about it. *Deadline* was read by people who wouldn't normally pick up comics, and with indie groups such as Blur featuring in its pages it could almost be said to have helped lay the groundwork for the rise of Britpop in the mid-'90s.

DEADLINE DOINGS

Dillon didn't draw a strip himself for *Deadline*, which featured Philip Bond's Wired World, Hewlett and Martin's Tank Girl, Peter Milligan's John Nemo and Nick Abadzis's Hugo Tate. Abadzis recalled on his blog: "I got involved in the mag thanks to the stroke of luck of renting a small studio in the space next door to *Deadline* just as they were starting up. When I found out who the neighbours were, I stuck my head over the partition that divided us and asked if they'd look at my portfolio. I can still recall their amusement at the cheek of that, the welcoming glow of their enthusiasm and energy.

"It was Brett who found an unnamed stickman character lurking at the back of my art samples. He stopped flicking through them, pulled a page out and said, 'This is different,' and handed it to Steve, who read it and nodded in approval. 'Yeah, we'll have this.' And it was Steve, after that point, who really became my storytelling mentor."

Dillon and Ewins handed over the editorial reins of *Deadline*

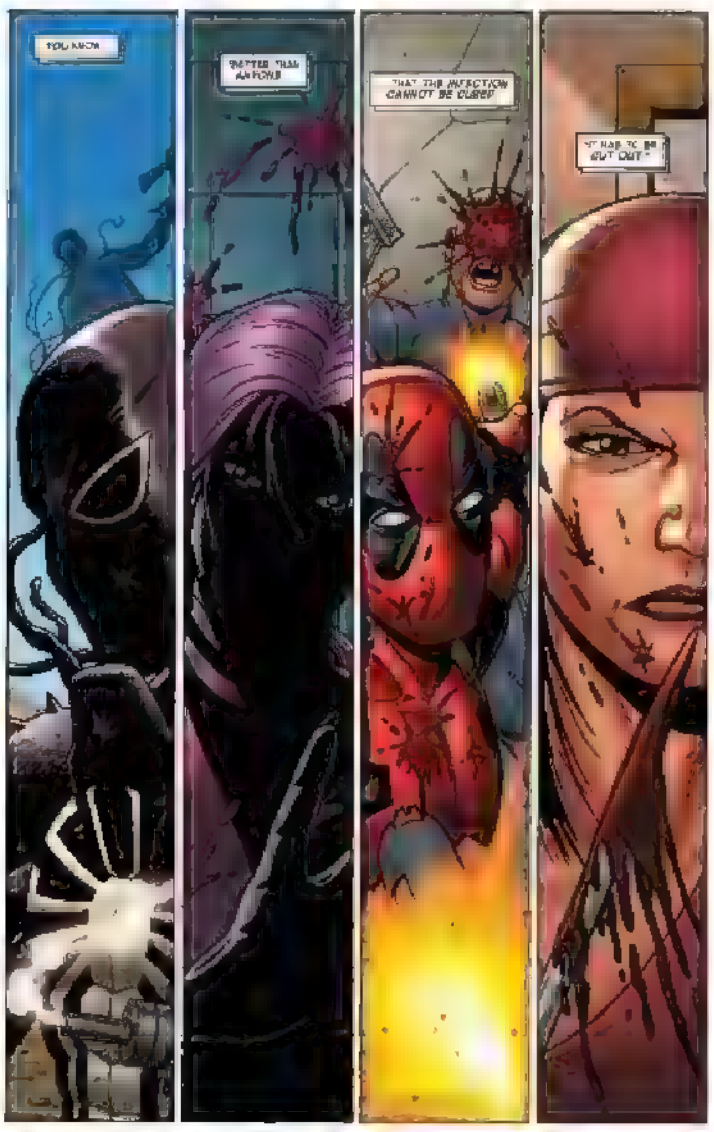
> "HAD DILLON DRAWN NOTHING OTHER THAN PREACHER, HIS PLACE IN HISTORY WOULD BE ASSURED"

Above: Steve Dillon illustrated just about every major series in *2000 AD* at one time or another, as well as numerous covers, Future Shocks and one off stories

2000 AD MAGES © REBE... ON MARVEL MAGES © MARVEL PREACHER © GARTH ENNIS & STEVE DILLON

within a couple of years. America – specifically DC Comics – was calling Dillon by 1989, and he drew for DC a six issue SF series called *Skreemer* before getting his teeth into what would become mainstay titles in DC's more adult Vertigo line: Grant Morrison's *Animal Man* and *Hellblazer*. At that time the adventures of John Constantine were under the writerly curation of one Garth Ennis, and this would be a partnership that would prove incredibly fruitful indeed.

In 1995, Ennis and Dillon debuted *Preacher* with Vertigo. The story of Jesse Custer, bonded to a angel demon hybrid and on a journey across America in search of God together with a diverse and varied cast of characters, is rightly regarded as one of the brightest highlights of even the hugely successful Vertigo line up. *Preacher* ran for 66 issues, concluding in the year 2000, and has recently been given a new lease of life with the AMC TV series starring Dominic Cooper as Jesse Custer.



IN THE YEAR OF OH-ONE
YOU FOLKS READY TO ORDER?
NOTHIN' FOR ME, THANKS.
I'LL HAVE THE CHICKEN SALAD BUT HOLD THE CHICKEN, PLEASE.
CHEESE-BURGER
HOLD THE CHICKEN?
THERE'S NOTHING ELSE I CAN EAT I'M A VEGETARIAN.
THAT'S NEW
BUT I FIGURES
WHAT'S THAT SUPPOSED TO MEAN?
IF YOU ASK POLITELY, THEY MIGHT MAKE YOU A NICE CABBAGE AN' PEANUT QUICHE-- HERE, I'VE GOT THIS BRILLIANT RECIPE FOR QUICHE!
YOU MAKE THE QUICHE RIGHT, AN' THEN YOU COOK IT, AN' THEN YOU THROW THE STUPID FUCKIN' THING OUT THE WINDOW THEN YOU GRILL YOURSELF A T-BONE AN EAT THAT INSTEAD
BUT LET'S GET BACK TO GOD

Above: Dillon's clear, down to earth but always engaging art gave *Preacher* a vital realism that helped keep it grounded no matter how off the wall and weird the stories became.

Had Steve Dillon drawn nothing else other than *Preacher*, his place in comics history would be assured. But throughout the 21st century he continued to work, becoming a Marvel Comics mainstay and working on some of Marvel's grittiest properties – Wolverine, Thunderbolts and especially the Punisher. Dillon worked on various projects featuring gun toting Frank Castle over the years, his latest beginning in May 2016, collaborating with writer Becky Cloonan.

A fan favourite to the end, and respected by fellow professionals from all corners of the comic book world, Steve Dillon was one of our finest and most prolific creators, and his impact on the medium over almost four decades can never be overestimated. CH

Assassin's Creed: Uprising

Titan's popular Assassin's Creed comic relaunches with this new title from writers Alex Paknadel and Dan Watters with artist Jose Holder. As the Phoenix Project edges closer to completion, only Charlotte de la Cruz and her allies can save the world from subjugation by a sinister new world order (they're never nice, NWOs, are they?). Issue 1 is on sale in February with various covers to choose from, including Holder, Alex Ronald, Sunsetagain, Jimbo Salgado and Doubleleaf.

SHAPERS OF **WORLDS**

RAPID-FIRE Q&As WITH COMIC CREATORS

CHIP ZDARSKY

The *Sex Criminals* co-creator talks to **Stephen Jewell** about taking charge of Marvel's Premier Space Cadet

Comic Heroes: You recently wrapped up your run with artist Joe Quinones on *Howard the Duck*, so was taking on *Star-Lord* next an easy decision?

Chip Zdarsky: It was pretty straightforward! The editor at the time, Jake Thomas, floated the idea by me, and I thought it made so much sense, especially after dealing with "an outcast on Earth" with Howard the Duck while also incorporating cosmic stuff. *Star-Lord* felt like the next logical step with the aftermath of *Civil War 2* having him trapped on Earth for a bit. He's like a handsome Howard!

CH: What do you like most about Peter Quill as a character?

CZ: He's got the air of a normal guy caught up in this crazy life, but he's also incredibly heroic as well. So it's fun to write the surface version of him, which can be humorous, but then show how he steps up to the plate and, you know, guards the galaxy, like he set out to do with the Guardians from the start. Howard was a reluctant hero while Peter is more of a proactive hero, and that can be really satisfying to write.

CH: Would you draw any comparisons between what you did on *Howard the Duck* and what you've got planned for Star-Lord?

CZ: Initially there'll be a lot of similarities, as both books revolve around a feeling of being trapped, and of loneliness. For Peter, it's the temporary condition of being stranded on Earth for a bit, and of the fallout from *Civil War 2*. And, yeah, I can't imagine writing a book and not having humour be a part of it. Peter's quick with a quip, for sure.

Right: Trapped in a world he never made? Zdarsky and Anka are bringing Star-Lord down to earth.

CH: After visiting his father's home planet, Spartax, in the previous *Star-Lord* series, Peter will be facing much more down-to-Earth challenges in your run...

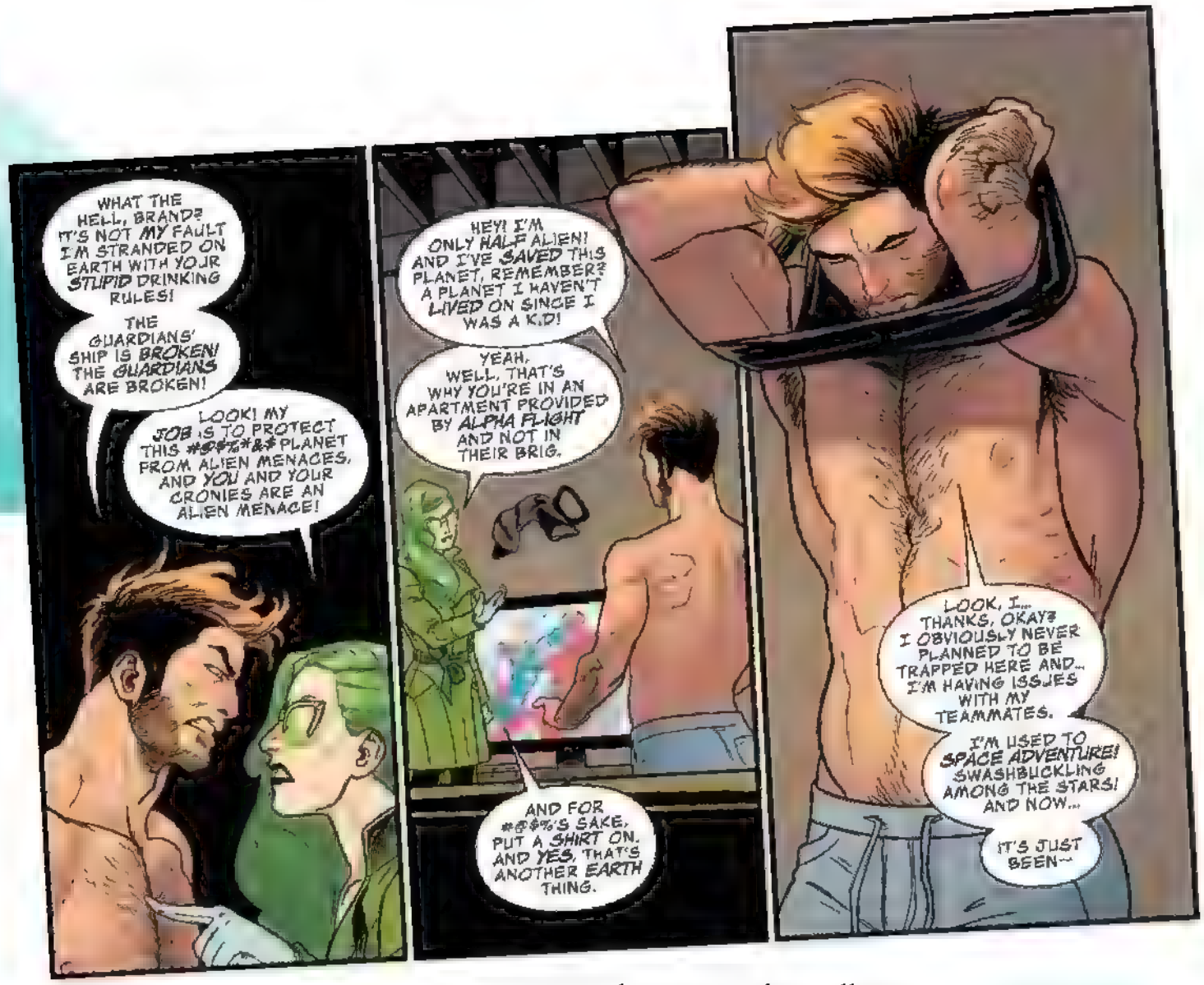
CZ: His time on Earth will seem to be low key, but Peter can't stay out of trouble for long. As for what else to expect, how about bureaucracy, Logan, Matt Murdock, telekinesis, ennui, Agent Brand, mob bosses, and a cautionary future...

Left: John Tyler Christopher provides yet another of his Action Figure variant covers. Collect 'em all!

CH: Chris Pratt's portrayal of Peter Quill in the first *Guardians* film was pretty memorable, and he's returning for *Guardians of the Galaxy 2*. Have you taken any aspects from his performance? Perhaps the on-screen Peter's love of '70s music?

CZ: It's kind of hard not to! He's pretty charming, so a lot of elements of what Chris Pratt has done have rubbed off on the comics version, for sure, and that kind of stuff is certainly fun to write and to read. As for the music thing, it's a little tricky to do that in comics.

CH: You're partnering with Kris Anka on *Star-Lord*. What qualities


WHAT THE HELL, BRAND? IT'S NOT MY FAULT I'M STRANDED ON EARTH WITH YOUR STUPID DRINKING RULES!
THE GUARDIANS' SHIP IS BROKEN! THE GUARDIANS ARE BROKEN!
LOOK! MY JOB IS TO PROTECT THIS #@$%&* PLANET FROM ALIEN MENACES, AND YOU AND YOUR CRONIES ARE AN ALIEN MENACE!
HEY! I'M ONLY HALF ALIEN! AND I'VE SAVED THIS PLANET, REMEMBER? A PLANET I HAVEN'T LIVED ON SINCE I WAS A KID!
YEAH. WELL, THAT'S WHY YOU'RE IN AN APARTMENT PROVIDED BY ALPHA FLIGHT AND NOT IN THEIR BRIG.
AND FOR #@$%'S SAKE, PUT A SHIRT ON. AND YES, THAT'S ANOTHER EARTH THING.
LOOK, I... THANKS, OKAY? I OBVIOUSLY NEVER PLANNED TO BE TRAPPED HERE AND... I'M HAVING ISSUES WITH MY TEAMMATES.
I'M USED TO SPACE ADVENTURE! SWASHBUCKLING AMONG THE STARS! AND NOW...
IT'S JUST BEEN--

does he bring to the book?

CZ: Oh my god, his work is absolutely gorgeous! Kris had two prerequisites when he took the job: he wanted some hunkiness for him to draw, and he wanted to be able to plan out the fight scenes, so I have gladly ceded those two things to him. His Peter is beautiful, and his fight scenes are stunning. I thought it couldn't get any better until Matt Wilson came on board, but his colour work elevates us so much it's ridiculous. The characters have really come to life with him on board. I know it's like, the thing writers always say when talking about their art teams, "blah blah blah they're the best blah blah," but seriously, this is a book I would pick up for the art alone.

CH: You're an artist yourself, and collaborated with Matt Fraction on *Sex Criminals* over at Image, so does that provide you with some insight into what it's like from the other side of the creative process?

CZ: I almost always have a visual for the page in my head when I'm writing, but I try to push those ideas out when I'm done. Only because one of two things will happen: either I'm stunned that the artist didn't do it my way, which in other words is the best way; or I'm stunned that they did it much better than I envisioned, which makes me feel like a terrible artist. The latter is usually the case.

> I can't imagine writing a book and not having humour be a part of it

Above: Although he was born on Earth, Peter Quill is much more at home among the stars, giving Zdarsky plenty of scope for culture clash and wry social commentary

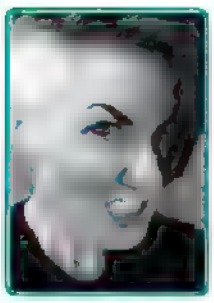
CH: Is there anything you wouldn't ask Kris to draw?

CZ: Oh god, I just have incredible guilt giving Kris crowd shots to draw. I try to make sure we don't linger too much on crowds in the script so he doesn't lose his mind, and I'm always trying to think of scenarios that would be more fun for him to draw. I mean, I haven't actually asked him if he hates crowd scenes. I'm just assuming he does, so maybe he loves them! Maybe I should make the next issue one giant crowd scene! I'm going to test that hypothesis and see what he does.

IMAGES © MARVEL. HEADSHOT © MATTHEW ZDARSKY

CHRISTA FAUST AND GARY PHILLIPS

The writers of *Peepland*, from Titan and Hard Case Crime, tel **Will Salmon** about recreating the sleazy side of '80s New York



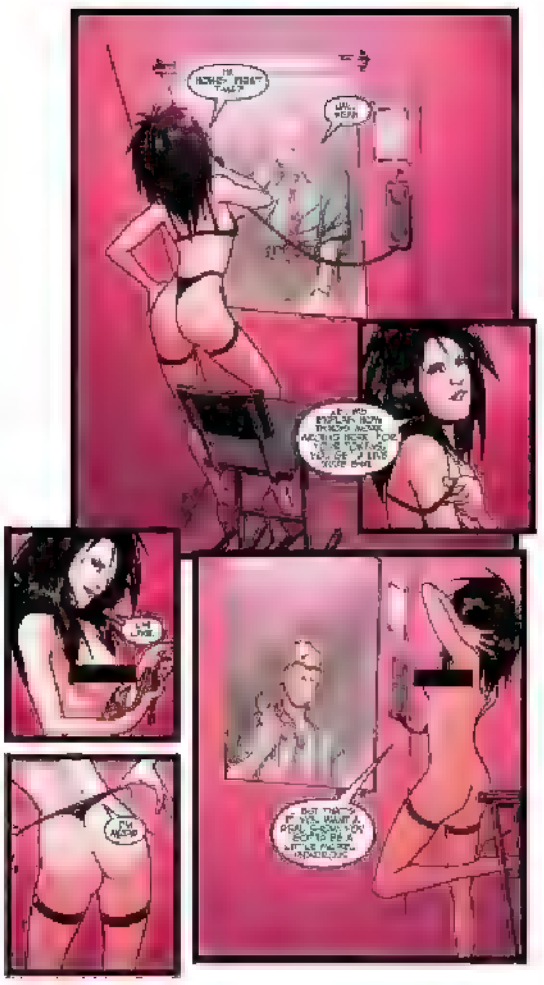
Comic Heroes: First, what can you tell us about the plot of *Peepland*?

Gary Phillips: It's Christmas 1986, Times Square, New York City. This is not the bland, touristy shopping plaza of today. Back then it was known as "The Deuce," a raunchy, dangerous sleaze pit lined with porno theaters, peep emporiums and video arcades. Its streets were populated by drug dealers and hustlers, punks and boy hookers and everyday blue collar New Yorkers just trying to get home to their crummy apartments without being mugged.

Roxy Bell, one of the girls who works the booths at Peepland, and her sometime boyfriend Nick Zero find themselves in possession of a video tape, an inadvertent filming of a murder. This crime references an infamous preppy murder case back then and the Central Park Five matter where five young men were railroaded into prison. Anyway, Roxy and Nick find themselves on the run from thugs sent to silence them when a powerful downtown developer looking to remake The Deuce for his personal gain realises the tape can derail his plans.

CH: Who are your central characters, Roxy and Nick?

Christa Faust: Roxy is a semi autobiographical character, a 19 year old peep booth girl who grew up in Hell's Kitchen like I did and is caring for an uncle dying from AIDS while struggling to define her own sexual identity.



Left: *Peepland* is not about titillation but does not gloss over the world its characters live in and what they do

Above: This cover by Fay Dalton has something of a noir feel, but the story tries to avoid genre cliches and takes a hard-nosed view of street life in 1980s New York City

Nick is a grindhouse theater usher and underground tape trader who plays in a punk band.

CH: What is it that makes 1980s New York such a rich setting?

CF: Well, it's my home town during the decade of my teens, so I have a nostalgic and deeply biased opinion of that time and place. It's in my DNA, a part of who I am. It's also long gone, gentrified beyond all recognition, so it means a lot to me to be able to share my memories of vintage New York with readers too young to have experienced it.

GP: I grew up in LA, on the other side of the country from New York. I knew the city from films like *The Pope of Greenwich Village*, *Ms. 45*, *China Girl* and *Alphabet City*. Films I'd see at the Tower Theater in downtown LA, three in a row I'd be in there from early to late afternoon. Steeped in that kind of filmic lore, I had to jump at the opportunity to work with Christa to tell this crime tale of late '80s Times Square and its characters.

CH: Christa, in what way is the series autobiographical?

CF: I grew up in the neighbourhood just west of Times Square and worked in the peep booths in my

late teens in the '80s just like Roxy. All the characters are based on real people I met while working there, as well as local fixtures in the NYC underground scene like Ugly George and Al Goldstein. Of course, I've never experienced the exact details of the story's central murder and its dangerous fallout, but part of what made me want to write it was the fact that I've never seen the peep show environment portrayed in a realistic and honest way that reflects my own experience. There's always an outsider's moral slant, a need to excite and titillate the readers or viewers with how naughty and/or debased these girls are. For those of us who actually worked there, it's just a job. We would joke and bitch about customers and have each other's backs, but we didn't have "hearts of gold." We were all just ordinary flawed humans, trying to make it through the day like every other New Yorker.

Top: Artist Andrea Camerini captured the place and time with the help of reference photos supplied by Christa Faust, who grew up there

Above: Caitlin Yarsky's variant cover is one of five in total for issue 1

CH: Gary, you've written widely in the crime genre. What keeps bringing you back to it?

GP: Ultimately in crime fiction your characters have to bare it all, whether they are the perpetrators or are caught in a snare not of their own making and sometimes it is something they've initiated, their psyches are in full tilt. Emotions are raw and paranoia is creeping into the edges of your intellect. The cold sweat is running down the side of your brow and you wonder, how the hell do I get out of this?

CH: You're both also novelists. How do you find writing comics compared to prose?

CF: The thing I found the most challenging was paring down the dialogue. I've always had an ear for dialogue and love snappy patter, but in comics you can't have much in the way of back and forth. The number of speech bubbles you can use in any given panel is limited and you need to use them judiciously to get your point across. I also learned so much from Gary about visual transitions and thinking in frozen slices of action rather than the more organic flow of prose.

GP: The best advice I've received for writing a comic book script was to keep in mind that each panel on a page is frozen action. Each panel leads us through a given scene as well as builds toward the unfolding overall plot and subplots. Your job as the writer is to communicate to the artist what's the (usually) single frozen action happening in each panel – and frankly, not have your dialogue and captions get in the way of the art.

CH: What does Andrea Camerini's art bring to the series?

CF: His gritty, realistic street scenes are what sold me on him as an artist. Vintage NYC is as much a character in *Peepland* as any of the humans in the story, and I needed to make sure we had someone who could capture the city the way I remember it. I didn't want a stylised, *Sin City* look, I wanted the real deal. Andrea delivered.

GP: Exactly. Andrea's sequentials capture the look and feel for what Christa and I were going for in the script. Comics is about the visuals, so you can only hope as a writer that you're in sync with the artist and in *Peepland*, his sequentials tell the story. CH

> Vintage New York City is as much a character as any of the humans in the story

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CHARLES SOULE

The prolific scribe ventures into the realms of magic with his new Image series *Curse Words*. He entrances **Stephen Jewell**

Comic Heroes: With your *Letter 44* concluding at Oni, was it important for *Curse Words* to be creator-owned?

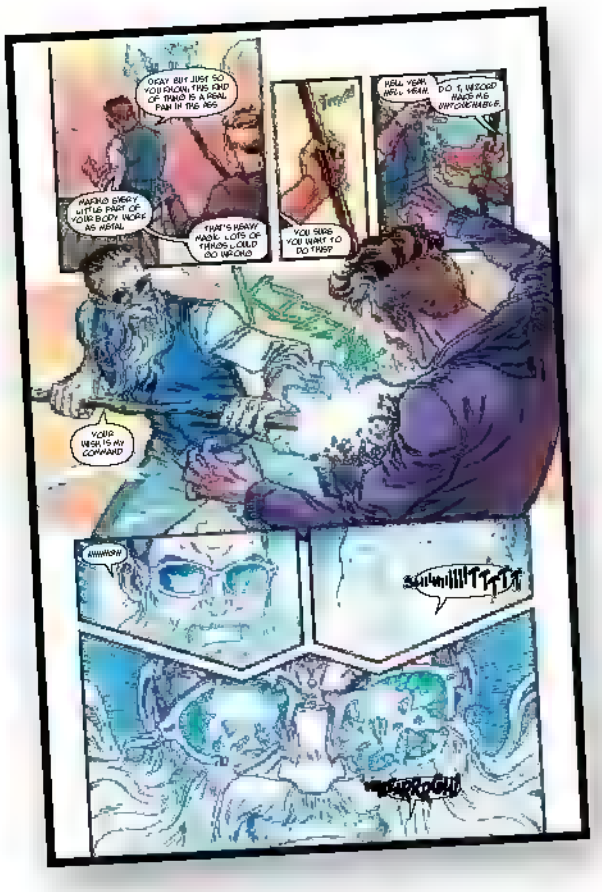
Charles Soule: Creator owned and work for hire are very different challenges for me. I love them both, as they scratch different itches and use different muscles. I think it would feel pretty weird not to have stories with my own characters and ideas getting out there, and as *Letter 44* will come to its planned conclusion in early 2017, I wanted to make sure I had some new creator owned coming out. And so... *Curse Words*.

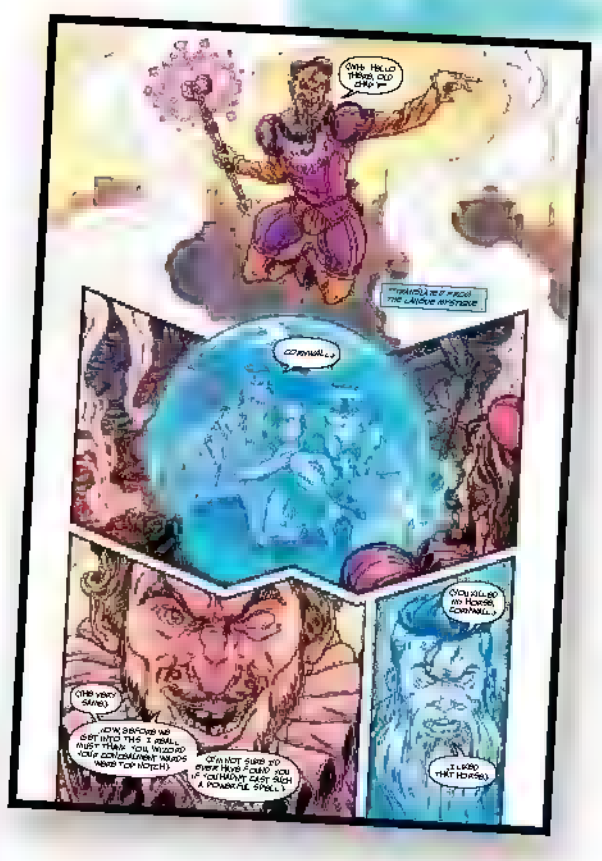
CH: Considering its popularity in novels, TV and film, is fantasy an under-rated genre in comics?

CS: It's under represented in Marvel and DC comics, for sure, but from *Saga* to *The Wicked + The Divine* to *Wayward*, fantasy's pretty alive and well at Image and elsewhere. Of course, it's often distilled through the creators' particular lens, but so is *Curse Words*, and that's the way it should be.

CH: Does *Curse Words* take a lead from any particular fantasy sagas?

CS: I'm an avid consumer of fantasy and genre in all its flavours. *Curse Words* is designed to be its own thing, but of course I've been influenced – as has the series' incredible artist, Ryan Browne – by all the fantasy we've consumed over the years. The idea here is to distil all that down and make something that feels new and familiar at the same time – to use the language and tropes of fantasy, but use them in our own way. For example, I often say that the fantastic land from whence our main character, Wizord the Wizard, hails is like Middle Earth, but if Sauron had won. You use the concepts people know to bring them in... and then you can really take them for a ride.


OKAY BUT JUST SO YOU KNOW, THIS KIND OF THING IS A REAL PAIN IN THE ASS
MAKING EVERY LITTLE PART OF YOUR BODY MORE AS METAL
THAT'S HEAVY MAGIC. LOTS OF THINGS COULD GO WRONG
YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS?
HELL YEAH, HELL YEAH
DO IT, WIZORD. MAKE HIS INVINCIBLE
YOUR WISH IS MY COMMAND
AHHHHH
SHWIII



Above: *Curse Words* has been described as The Lord of the Rings meets Breaking Bad But as Wizord fights off the assassins sent to kill him, he incidentally also saves New York .. so is he becoming the hero he initially only pretended to be?

CH: Tell us about these assassins...

CS: They're all of Sizzajee's other disciples, who are all different and all scary, like Botchko the hogtaur, which is like a centaur but a hog instead of a horse. We also see Ruby Stitch, who is Wizord's ex, and many more. They all have their grudges against Wizord, and cool backstories of their own. We also have some fantastic non magical folks in our world — the supporting cast in the book is great.

CH: Was it important to set the series in New York?

CS: I've lived in New York for two decades, and a lot of my work has revolved around this city in all its complexity. In fact, I wrote an entire graphic novel, *Strange Attractors*, which is about exactly that — the scope, grandeur and danger of New York City. It's a wonderful backdrop for a story, and putting Wizord here was very intentional. We thought about Chicago, or Detroit as Ryan and I both spent a lot of time living in and around Detroit as kids, but New York had a gravity that was hard to deny.

CH: Does *Curse Words* take place in a world familiar with magic, or is it a complete surprise?

CS: It's a complete surprise they've never seen a wizard before, which is partly why Wizord is embraced so quickly and becomes so famous. It's also why they don't ask all the questions that they should, which really comes back to bite them in the ass.

LOOK AT THIS!
I, TOO, SQUIRTED!
HOW DO YOU KILL THE PLATINUM GOLEM?
SUPER MAN: WHATEVER.
BUT I CAN'T FEEL NOTHIN' 'CAUSE I'M NUMB AS HELL!
BUT I'M ALL MOIST!
WHAT THE HELL DID YOU EXPECT? YOU'RE DEAD.
BUT YET HERE YOU ARE STILL WALKING AND TALKING.
THAT WAS SOME PUSSYFOOTIN' AROUND THERE.
YOU HAVE NO IDEA HOW HARD THAT WAS!
YOU KNOW, I'M HONESTLY A LITTLE SURPRISED YOU PULLED IT OFF.

> The challenge is to write a character you love who does some really despicable things

CH: You've worked with Ryan before, including an issue of his series *God Hates Astronauts*. What does he bring to *Curse Words*?

CS: We've been close friends for years, and we've been trying to find a gap in both our schedules to do a book together, so I'm so glad it worked out. Ultimately, we just make each other laugh, but not in exactly the same way. His gags aren't my gags, which means we can surprise each other a lot and create something together neither one of us could have made alone. Plus, he's just an astonishing talent who takes his craft incredibly seriously, and it really shows. There is no B game with Ryan Browne; it's all and only his A game.

CH: *Curse Words* is an ongoing monthly, so do you know how it will eventually conclude?

CS: We have an ending in mind, but if the book does as well as we're hoping, that could certainly be spun out for a while. The concept is very flexible, but however long it goes, I can promise you that every issue will be a blast. CH

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VIVEK TIWARY

The Broadway producer turned graphic novelist tells **Abigail Chandler** about the Eisner-award-winning *The Fifth Beatle*...

© J T B.I NORA. S

Comic Heroes: What attracted you to the story of Brian Epstein?

Vivek Tiwary: I was in business school, the year was 1991 and I was dreaming about a life in the arts and entertainments industries, that was my passion... And being a big Beatles fan I believed that the Beatles and their management team wrote and then re wrote the rules of the pop music business. So I thought I should study the life of Brian Epstein... However, what I also uncovered as I was doing this research was the human side of his story. He was gay at a time when it was a felony, Jewish at a time of great anti-Semitism, and from Liverpool at a time where Liverpool was considered a dirty port town in the north... so that story of the gay Jewish kid from Liverpool who changed the world through music was very inspiring to the scrawny Indian weirdo from New York's Lower East Side who wanted to write comic books and produce musicals.

CH: What made you decide that a graphic novel was the right way to tell his story?

VT: I've loved comics ever since I was a kid. I grew up reading comics... So that's the easy answer, I've just always wanted to do one and this one just seemed to make sense.

My mission here is to sing the unsung story of Brian Epstein, to get as many people to learn about his story as possible. And I believed that a thin 120 page graphic novel would best serve that mission. I believed the graphic novel format would just pick up more readers. It would pick up comics fans, it would pick up Beatles fans and it would pick up people who were just curious, who wanted to know "what is this comic book about

Right: No, not Pete Best or even George Martin – *The Fifth Beatle* tells the story of the Beatles' manager Brian Epstein.

Left: *The Fifth Beatle* has won several awards including two Harveys in 2014, one being Best Original Graphic Novel

the Beatles manager that's $15 and looks gorgeous? Let me just give it a chance."

CH: How did the artists come on board the project?

VT: I didn't actually have to do a long interview process with artists the two guys that I needed and wanted to do it [Andrew Robinson and Kyle Baker] responded to both the idea and the script material. Both those guys are amazing artists and I was incredibly blessed that I was able to get them both to do my book. It was also very clear from the beginning that both of those guys were going to be very collaborative. Because *The Fifth Beatle* is such a labour of love for me, I did have a very clear vision for a number of sequences, but, not having ever done a graphic novel before, there were also a number of sequences where I knew the emotions of the characters, I knew what I wanted to get across, but I had no idea how to do it in art. So I was very keen to work with artists who were going to be very patient with me on both sides.

CH: What was the most challenging aspect of the story for you to figure out how to tell?

Spain ...
1963
WE'VE REALLY DONE IT NOW.
WHAT'S THAT?
MADE IT--TO THE TOPPERMOST OF THE POPPERMOST.
HMPH. HARDLY
HOW DO YOU MEAN?
ENGLAND'S A STEP BUT AMERICA, THAT'S THE GATEWAY TO THE WORLD.
DON'T BE DAFT.
DON'T BE SOFT.
DID YOU THINK HE WAS ATTRACTIVE, THEN?
WHO?
THE MATADOR THAT'S WHY YOU LIKE BULLFIGHTING.
I LIKE BULLFIGHTING BECAUSE IT'S A BEAUTIFUL, AGGRESSIVE SPORT, AT HIS FINAL MOMENT OF TRIUMPH, THE MATADOR BECOMES DEATH--HE KILLS THE KILLING MACHINE.
BUT NOT BEFORE HE GIVES THE BULL ITS GLORY SHOWS THE WORLD ITS BEAUTY, IT'S POWER, ITS MAJESTY.
HE ALSO GIVES THE AFICIONADOS SOMETHING TO BELIEVE IN, SOMETHING TO ADMIRE, AND ULTIMATELY SOMETHING TO HATE. SO IN THE END, HE GIVES PEOPLE HOPE.
HE LOVES THE ARENA, THE CITY THE NATION, VERY BEAUTIFUL
SO YES, I DO FIND HIM ATTRACTIVE, BUT NOT IN THE WAY YOU, ALRIGHT THINK
WHAT ABOUT HIM, THEN?
UMMM, NO, TOO CLUMSY.
WHAT'S THAT GOT TO DO WITH HIS LOOKS?
EVERYTHING
AND NOW?
NOT SO MUCH.
YOU'RE MAD. HE'S GOT ALL THE BIRDS!
WOMEN AREN'T NATURALLY THE BEST JUDGERS OF TASTE. HE'S QUITE ORDINARY!
AND THAT ONE?
NO.
UMMM, WE...HIM, THEN?
YES, HIM. VERY CLASSIC FEATURES. ELEGANT FACE
WE'LL WE AGREE AFTER ALL.
AND HOW ABOUT ME? DO YOU FIND ME ATTRACTIVE?

Above: The graphic novel, published by Dark Horse in 2013, has been released in a new trade paperback Expanded Edition with extra material such as essays and bonus art including concept sketches by Kyle Baker

VT: I would say because I'd been studying Brian's life for so long, I was less concerned about how do I tell this on the page; the real challenge was figuring out *what* to tell on the page. I very much wanted to keep this graphic novel around 120 pages, and so the big question was what do you leave in and what do you take out? Because I could have easily written a 300-400 page prose biography. And that was very challenging.

CH: The story deals with real-life people, both living and dead. Did anyone resist being depicted?

VT: To be completely honest with you it didn't occur to me to really worry about that stuff... I was very meticulous about making sure that all the living people were aware of what I was doing, and I was constantly filling them in, partially out of courtesy and partially out of the hope that if I was doing something incorrectly they may say "Well, it didn't happen like that, it happened like this". I wanted to get the story straight. But I never thought to worry about "Will they be okay with the way I'm portraying them?" And thankfully I guess I was right not to worry — no one ever came back to me and said "Please change the way you're portraying me".

> No-one ever came back to me and said 'Please change the way you're portraying me'

CH: What can you tell us about the TV adaptation?

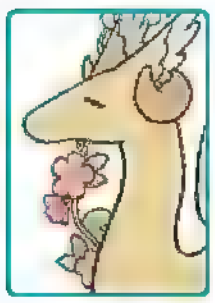
VT: We have secured the approval of the band. Paul, Ringo, Yoko Ono and Olivia Harrison have all signed off on the project and we've been granted unprecedented access to Beatles songs. It's literally the first and only time that they have ever approved a project about their history to get music. So we're very honoured by that accomplishment and responsibility. We do think of that as a responsibility and we have to do it right.

The current plan is for it to be six one hour episodes. I think the six hour palette will allow me to tell all the little details that I had to leave out [of the graphic novel], but not get so long that it'll become just for Beatles fans. I think within six hours we can make sure that it's also an inspiring human story and not just be for people who are interested in Beatles minutiae. CH

IMAGES © VERTIGO

KATIE O'NEILL

The creator of the unique *Princess Princess Ever After* tells **Kimberley Margaux** about bringing her web comic to print



Comic Heroes: In September, your 2014 web comic *Princess Princess* was published in physical format by Oni Press. What was it like revisiting this story?

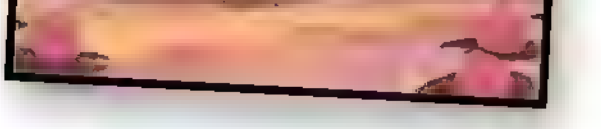
Katie O'Neill: It's been amazing! Since I originally made it two years ago, I had been self publishing small quantities and taking them to conventions in Australia, America and Canada to sell, so in some ways the story really stayed with me all this time. Being able to talk to people about the comic and hear their reactions kept it close and important to me, so getting the chance to reach a wider audience and touch up some of the art and lettering was an absolute dream.

CH: The managing editor at Oni Press said she'd have loved this book as a child. Why do you think it appeals to young people?

KO: With *Princess Princess*, I wanted to make a story that was appealing both in terms of humour, adventure and character growth, as well as having positive LGBT content. There have always been, and always will be, young readers who are in need of heroes who reflect their own queer identity. I hope the appeal comes from both an interesting story, and in having a safe place for young people to see themselves.

CH: *Princess Princess* is a fairy tale that subverts the classic tropes: a princess saves a princess instead of the usual prince. What inspired you to tell a story like this and what did you hope to achieve?

KO: I feel like subverting fairy tale tropes isn't exactly anything new, but I wanted to do it in a way that embodied ideas I think are really important – particularly, that everyone has their own strength and value as a person, and while that might sometimes conflict with the role society expects you to play, you can find your own path if you're kind to yourself and others. That's definitely a key message I would love kids to hear.



Right: Amira and Sadie are two very different princesses who decide to take their happily-ever-after into their own hands

CH: Your princesses are very different from traditional depictions: Amira is androgynous; Sadie calls herself "big-boned". Do you think it's important that stories for young people include such varied representations of femininity?

KO: Absolutely! I think it would be helpful and healthy to have much more nuanced and fluid depictions of femininity, masculinity, and the spectrum in between and outside of those. To me, there's no point in saying "girl power" if you're only ever depicting one type of girl.

CH: Are there elements of your personal life that have had an influence on what you like to draw and write about?

KO: I like to incorporate lessons I've personally learned about my own self worth and being kinder to myself, as well as drawing on lots of media that I've enjoyed growing up. A number of people have said that *Princess Princess* reminds them of classic shoujo

Left: Katie's latest web comic started with the Tea Dragons and their lore – and her desire to communicate the value of keeping traditions and crafts alive

manga, which always makes me really happy because that's a big influence on me.

CH: Before *Princess Princess* you released a web comic called *Counting Stars*. Are there themes and topics that you like to explore in each of your works?

KO: *Counting Stars* was a short story about the importance of friendship, so you could say that my works often focus on the relationships between different characters, and their relationship with the world in general. Feeling attached and connected, and understanding one's worth are all important themes for me.

CH: It looks like you have quite a devoted Tumblr following. What is it like being part of an active online community?

KO: For an artist working mostly in isolation in a country with a small creative industry [New Zealand], it's really fantastic. It helps you connect to so many people, both in terms of audience and other creators. It's extremely inspiring and very helpful to be able to gauge feedback and reaction when posting development work or sketches.

CH: What is your new web comic, *The Tea Dragon Society*, about and how has your work evolved since *Princess Princess*?

KO: *The Tea Dragon Society* is about a young blacksmith named Greta, who comes across a small creature known as a Tea Dragon and is drawn into the world of caring for these demanding beasts. She learns more about the people who go to the enormous lengths of raising them, and understands the importance of keeping traditional crafts alive. Compared to *Princess Princess* it has a lot more slice of life, and goes at a more gentle pace.

> There will always be young readers in need of heroes who reflect their own queer identity

Above: *Princess Princess* is a sensitively told tale that doesn't hit you over the head with its message but instead will resonate deeply with children, especially those struggling with others' expectations of them.

I wanted to focus more on world building and character development than a big quest style adventure.

CH: Do you have any advice or practical tips for young people who want to make comics?

KO: Read lots and watch lots of movies – you'll naturally pick up a sense of pacing, staging, composition and scriptwriting. There are a lot of books on the subject, but nothing can replace developing a natural instinct for visual storytelling. Find projects you love and start out small – try ten pages to start with, then 50, then keep going. Your first projects will teach you a lot, including valuable lessons for longer works.

CH: What are your hopes and goals for your work in the future?

KO: I'd love to continue doing what I'm doing, making graphic novels for young readers and telling the stories I have in my head. I'd love to get to the point of working on a longer series, with multiple volumes so it can tell a more developed and complex story. CH

IMAGES © KAT LEONE

Central Park South
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THE BIG 2017 COMICS PREVIEW

WORDS BY: DAVID BARNETT

From monsters laying waste to the Marvel Universe to the Justice League of America taking centre-stage once more; from Judge Dredd and Co. hitting the big 4-0 to the return of Dan Dare; from Paper Girls to Palookaville, by way of Warren Ellis's return to WildStorm – we've put together the essential guide to the year's biggest, best and most exciting new comics. So sit back and take notes – your pull-list is about to get a lot longer... »

MARVEL

The House of Ideas hits the ground running – or rather *stomping* – in January with ***Monsters Unleashed***. Classic early-Marvel monsters **Fin Fang Foom**, **Rommbu**, and **Googam, son of Goom**, along with slightly later Kirby creation **Devil Dinosaur** are among the beasties waging war on the Marvel U. Find out more in our feature on page 82.

Marvel's other big relaunch title, ***Inhumans Vs. X-Men***, which got going in December, will pave the way for both of Marvel's super-powered races to get their own title reboots in 2017. Mutants have always been the "other" race on Marvel Earth, but with contractual shenanigans seeing the Inhumans dragged from relative obscurity to take centre stage in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, especially in the *Agents Of SHIELD* TV series, this is a nice way to reconcile that as the Terrigen Mist which gives the Inhumans their powers is discovered to be poisonous to Mutants. Expect punch-ups galore from the creative team of Charles Soule, Jeff Lemire and Leinil Yu.

Talking of the Inhumans, here comes the king of Attilan, ***Black Bolt***, in his own series premiering in March from novelist Saladin Ahmed and artist Christian Ward – the first time the unspeaking hero has been given his own title.

Previous page: DC's *The Wild Storm* by series artist John Davis-Hunt, plus a glimpse of Titan's space opera *Khoa*.

Another debutante in March (must be the month for it) is ***America*** – America Chavez, straight from the pages of *Young Avengers*. Marvel have put YA novelist Gabby Rivera on writing duties with art from *Howard the*

SALADIN AHMED

THE LOCUS AWARD-WINNING WRITER TURNED BLACK BOLT SCRIBE

CH: So, Black Bolt... How does it feel to be taking on one of the veteran characters of the Marvel Universe?
SA: It's thrilling, because Black Bolt is of an age with the most celebrated Marvel heroes – born in the same era as Hulk, Iron Man, Spider-Man, etc. He comes directly from Jack Kirby and Stan Lee. But the Inhumans have never been as famous. They've always been in this sort of weird cult corner of the Marvel Universe. So Black Bolt has a long history but little of the baggage of fame, as it were. Makes for a great sandbox.

CH: Are you a big comics fan?
SA: I only follow a few titles these days, but yes. Comics – and Marvel comics in particular – were my bread-and-butter reading as a kid. They helped teach me to write. They helped me make sense of the world. So this feels like coming full circle in a wonderful way.

CH: You're an established novelist, of course... How does writing for comics compare to prose?
SA: The pace is radically different – novels can take years to write, an issue of a comic takes weeks. But mostly it's the collaboration that makes it exciting. Christian Ward is supremely talented, and the back-and-forth between writer and artist is like nothing else. There's no equivalent to it in prose.

CH: Black Bolt's unusual, possibly unique, in that he doesn't speak... for fear of unleashing terrible power. What challenges does this bring to writing him?
SA: I won't give away too much, but this is a pretty big part of the book. Stylistically, yes, but also plot-wise. Spending your whole life *able* to speak, but *unwilling* to because of the harm it would cause? That's a pretty deep mindfuck, and there's a lot to explore there.

CH: What do you hope to bring to the character?
SA: Self-awareness. Black Bolt was raised as a king and is arguably one of the most powerful beings on earth. He doesn't know much about humility or self-doubt. But he's about to learn... A lot of readers are mad, perhaps with good reason, at Black Bolt for some of the imperious decisions he's made over the past couple years. We will absolutely see him wrangling with the consequences of those decisions in this book.

CH: If you could write anyone else in the Marvel Universe, who would it be?
SA: I honestly don't know. I've been wanting to write Crusher Creel, the Absorbing Man, as a protagonist for years. And he's going to be a big part of this story, so I feel like I already got my pick.

Duck's Joe Quinones, as Marvel's "Latina powerhouse" mixes up alternate Earths, alien hordes and homework.

Novelists-turned-comic writers seem to be Marvel's thing this Spring. *Goosebumps* legend R.L. Stine is dipping his toes into the graphic form with a most welcome return of ***Man-Thing***, alongside artist German Peralta (*Moon Knight*). Expect horror and twisted humour as the shambling muck-monster yomps his way through the Marvel U... *Man-Thing* debuts in... yep, you guessed it, March.

DC

Over at DC, the big news for 2017 is the Justice League, which is no great surprise as the movie hoves inexorably into view.

February will see two JL first issues: the ***Justice League Of America: Rebirth*** one-shot, which in the style of DC's latest reboot introduces a new take on a classic property with a one-off issue, this one spinning out of the *Justice League vs Suicide Squad* series. This time around the JLA line-up consists of Batman, Black Canary, Killer Frost, the Ray, Vixen, the Atom and apparently Lobo.

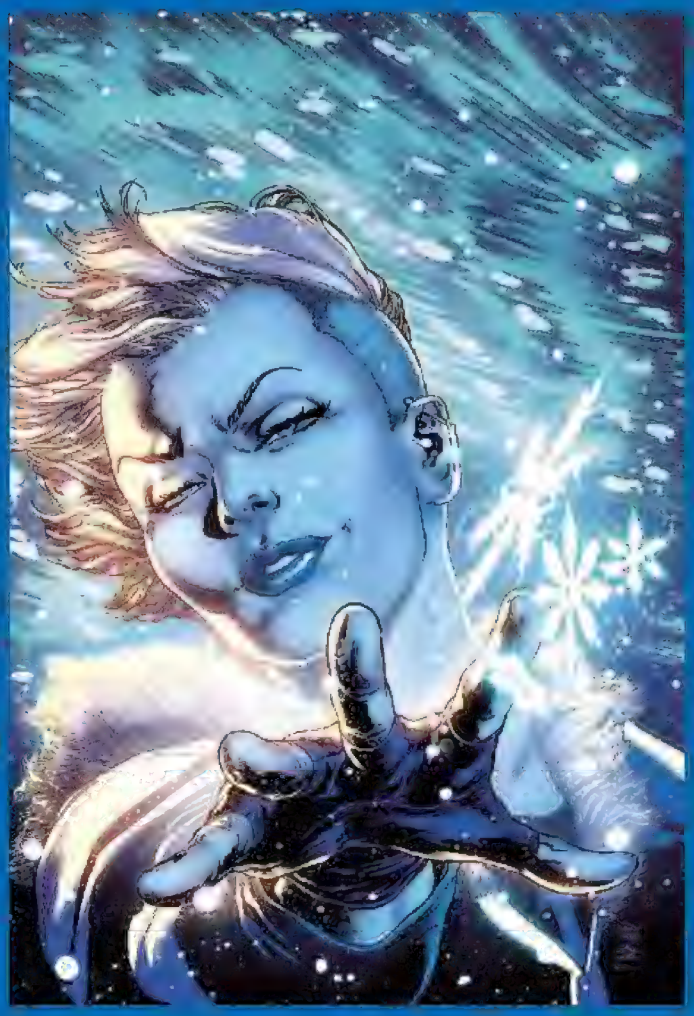
The one-shot creative team of Steve Orlando, Ivan Reis and Joe Prado will, the same month, be on duty for **Justice League Of America** number one, which gets business in order with the introduction of the Extremists – alternate-Earth superhumans who want to make us safe and happy... at any cost.

But that's not all. DC is releasing a series of one-shots in January focusing on the less well-known JLA members: ***Justice League Of America: The Atom Rebirth***, by Orlando and Andy MacDonald, which brings us new Atom Ryan Choi; ***Justice League Of America: Vixen Rebirth*** #1, by Orlando and Jody Houser with art by Jamal Campbell; ***Justice League Of America: The Ray Rebirth*** #1 (Orlando and Stephen Byrne); and ***Justice League Of America: Killer Frost Rebirth*** #1, again teaming Orlando and Houser with art by Mirka Andolfo, featuring the villain making the leap from Suicide Squad to JLA... if Amanda Waller will let her.

But what's that you say? The Justice League just isn't powerful enough for you? Ah, then you'll be wanting to check out Warren Ellis's hotly-anticipated return to the superhero genre with February's ***The Wild Storm*** #1.

With art by Jon Davis-Hunt and a clutch of variant covers by Tula Lotay, Jim Lee and Scott Williams, this sees a fresh take on the WildStorm universe created by Jim Lee, in which Ellis had enormously over-the-top superhero fun with The Authority back in the day. *The Wild Storm*, according to DC, "resets" the WildStorm universe. Apollo and Midnighter, of course, have made the jump to the DC Universe proper, but we're promised here new iterations of Jenny Sparks, The Engineer and others, and this ongoing series will lead into a handful of other titles, including new runs for W.I.L.D.C.A.T.S. and Zealot.

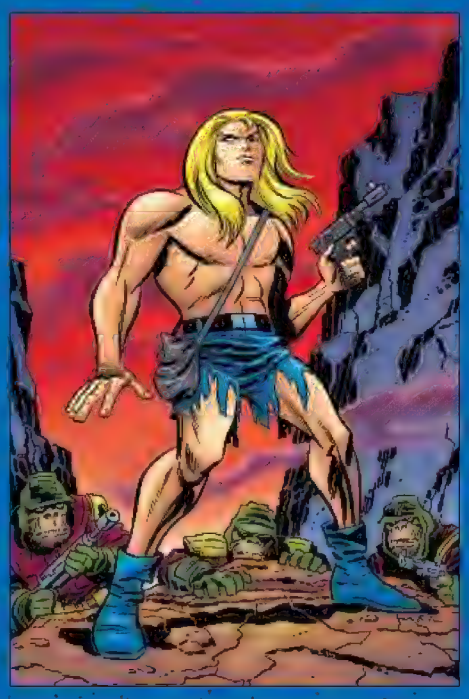
Also beginning in 2017 is ***The Kamandi Challenge***, which features no fewer than 14 creative teams working on a round-robin basis... Each issue will finish on a cliff-hanger featuring the post-apocalyptic world of the Last Boy on Earth (originally created by Jack Kirby), which the next team then has to pick up and run with, as in 1986's *DC Challenge*. Details are scarce on this one at the moment, but it sounds fascinating. >



Opposite: *Inhumans vs. X-Men* promises to be Marvel's big bang to start the new year.

Above: Killer Frost joins the JLA – or possibly that should read "annihilates." We'll see this month.

Below: *Kamandi* enjoyed the longest run of all the titles Jack Kirby created for DC in the '70s, and he's back again... although not all the artists are likely to draw him quite as Kirbyesque as here.



"NOVELISTS WRITING COMICS IS MARVEL'S THING THIS SPRING"

SUN BAKERY

COMIC BOOK ANTHOLOGY MAGAZINE

1

DREAM SKILLS

AREM

IMAGE

Image are throwing a host of new titles at us in the early part of 2017, but first good news on a break out hit. Brian K. Vaughan & Tiff Chiang and Matt Wilson's ***Paper Girls*** #11 drops in February beginning a new story arc as Erin, Mac and Tiff reunite with KJ and face a horrifying new threat.

As for new stuff, writer artist Ken Garing brings us ***Planetoid Praxis***, a sequel to his 2012 series *Planetoid*. Now the inhabitants of a distant world have defeated their robot overlords, unexpected new visitors bring new complications. Don't worry if you haven't read the original, however – this political SF story works as a standalone tale.

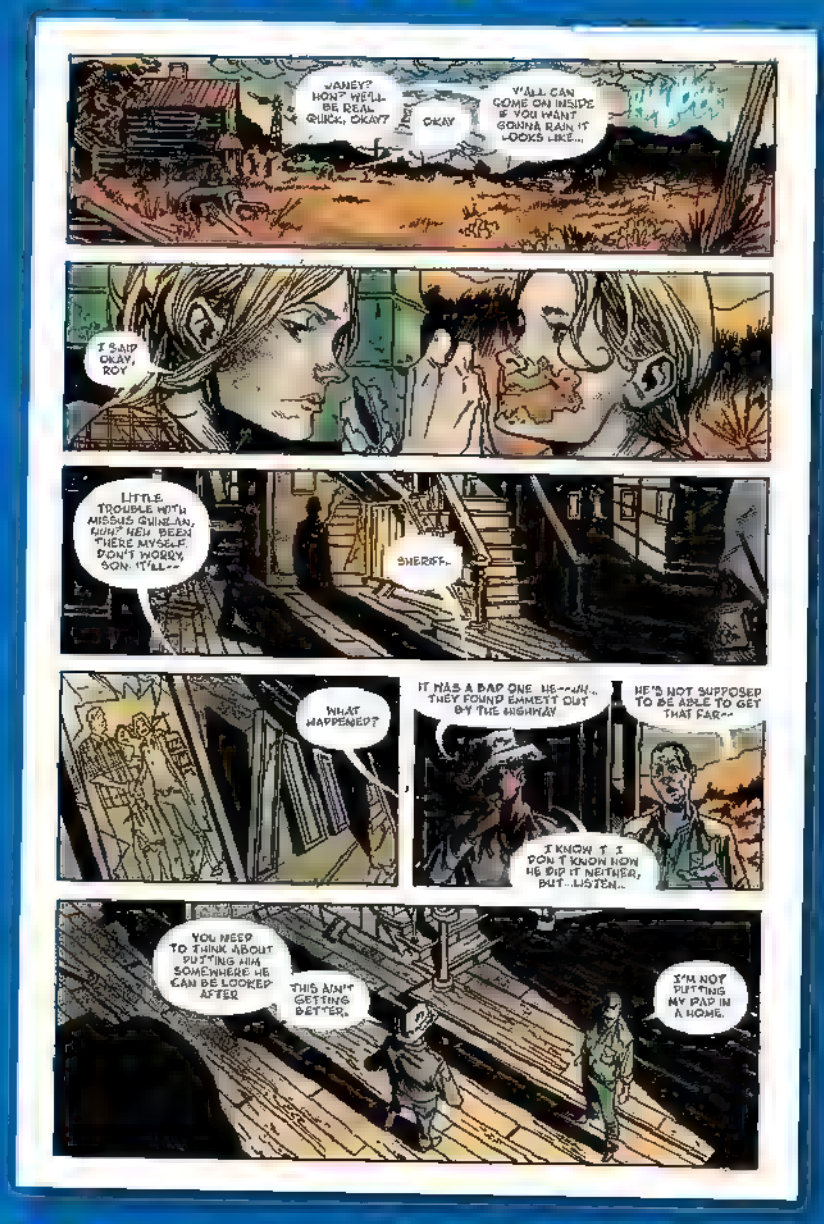
God Country #1 from Donny Cates, Geoff Shaw, Jason Wordie and John J. Hill has an interesting premise: dementia-suffering oldster Emmet Quinlan rises from the wreckage of his tornado-levelled Texas town with a magic sword that gives him the mind and body he could only dream of, plus a new job taking on some nasty otherworldly creatures. Image are calling this "Southern Bastards meets American Gods" – a tantalising pitch.

Sun Bakery is a manga-style anthology book from the mind and pen of Corey Lewis. Originally an indie hit, it's been picked up by Image, who will be showcasing the diverse range of strips by Lewis: promising "sentient paranormal skateboards, mecha-suited documentarian bounty hunters and sword-culture spirit warriors".

Finally, Greg Rucka and Leandro Fernandez look at a different type of longevity with ***The Old Guard***, launching at the end of February, in which immortal soldiers offer their services to those who can afford them.

DARK HORSE

Not only do we get a new Hellboy spin-off in Spring, and not only is it written by Mike Mignola, but art comes from the phenomenal Paul Grist, he of Jack Staff fame. ***The Visitor: How and Why He Stayed***


WANEY? HON? WE'LL BE REAL QUICK, OKAY?
OKAY
Y'ALL CAN COME ON INSIDE IF YOU WANT GONNA RAIN IT LOOKS LIKE...
I SAID OKAY, ROY.
LITTLE TROUBLE WITH MISSUS QUINLAN, HUH? HEH. BEEN THERE MYSELF. DON'T WORRY, SON. IT'LL--
SHERIFF.
WHAT HAPPENED?
IT HAS A BAD ONE. HE--UH... THEY FOUND EMMETT OUT BY THE HIGHWAY
HE'D NOT SUPPOSED TO BE ABLE TO GET THAT FAR--
I KNOW I. I DON'T KNOW HOW HE DID IT NEITHER, BUT...LISTEN...
YOU NEED TO THINK ABOUT PUTTING HIM SOMEWHERE HE CAN BE LOOKED AFTER
THIS AIN'T GETTING BETTER.
I'M NOT PUTTING MY DAD IN A HOME.

Above: A preview page from Image's *God Country*, Yeehaa

Opposite: *Sun Bakery* brings Corey Lewis's indie favourite manga mayhem to Image

takes us back to 1944 and the conjuring of Hellboy in order to give Hitler a demonic edge in World War II. As we all know, Professor Trevor Bruttenholm was there to guide Hellboy on the

>

KIERON GILLEN

WRITER OF THE WICKED + DIVINE...

CH: *Wicked + Divine* is well established as a firm fan favourite now... Back at the beginning, did you think it would ever take off so well? And what can you tease about where the title goes in 2017?

KG: This is always a tricky one to answer. Because obviously, we're not deluded enough to think that it would have been as successful as it has been. We were thinking it'd settle quickly at around 13k sales, which would have been amazing. However, at the same time, we were aware that if any book we did was going to be a genuine hit, it'd be this one. *WicDiv* is our *Ziggy Stardust*, and clearly aspires to be a huge cult. So that it happened... Well, we'd be disingenuous to claim that we weren't considering it as a best case scenario. 2017 is the whole of our IMPERIAL PHASE. Normally *WicDiv* crescendos at the end of every trade. In the third year, it's different. It's more post-rock in approach, doing our narrative take on Mogwai's *Mogwai Fear Satan*. We plan to deafen people.

CH: "Über: Invasion" takes the superhuman war to the United States. What can we expect to see? And do you have the Über alternate-history planned out beyond this arc?

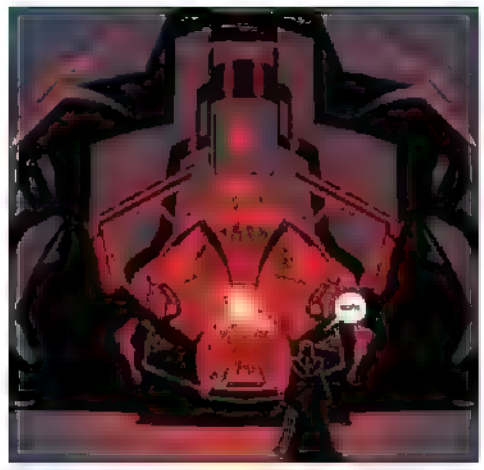
KG: Well, we start the year with perhaps the most depressing, relentlessly grim comic I've ever written, which basically spends an issue wandering around the remains of a city after an attack. That's the sort of thing which separates Uber from most war-set comics. And the future? Well, Uber was always had large structure. Even back in 2008, I had the 55-odd issues planned. Uber: Invasion should be 24 issues long, and I've got the plot broken down for every single issue. It's very much a planned one.

CH: You've played in the *Star Wars* toy box before for comics, notably in the *Darth Vader* series... With *Doctor Aphra* we're seeing a less well-known character take centre-stage than in your previous *Star Wars* work. Are we going to get a different view of the *Star Wars* universe through Aphra?

KG: Definitely. Aphra is a rogue, but not in the heart-of-gold approach of Han Solo. She's got a silver tongue, and is great fun to hang out with, but she's very much a star in a black, black comedy about awful people having two-fisted archaeological adventures. You get a different look at the galaxy when you're coming from a place like that.

CH: What are you really looking forward to seeing, comics-wise, from the coming year?

KG: Oh man. There's so much stuff here. And most of it is stuff that I know about which I can't talk about yet, as it's still secret. Here's one for you: Ray Fawkes' new book for Image is going to be amazing. *Underwinter: Symphony*. I've read the first issue, and it's brooding, smart and utterly wicked.



straight and narrow but Bruttenholm wasn't the only witness to Hellboy's arrival. This new book is about what happens to the visitor who is sent to kill the conjured demon.

Humorous superhero saga Empowered gets a new first issue in February with ***Empowered and the Soldier of Love*** marking ten years of Adam Warren's creation with art by Karla Diaz as the heroes wonder if love can really conquer all in the face of the rather embittered International Magical Girl of Mystery.

And there's a treat in January with the ***Black Hammer Giant-Sized Annual***, illustrated by an all-star list of artists including Dustin Nguyen, Emi Lenox, Nate Powell, Matt Kindt, and Ray Fawkes taking on Jeff Lemire's Black Hammer superhero tales.

DYNAMITE

There's two-fisted and sword-slicing entertainment a-go-go from Dynamite next year as they once again put an imaginative new spin on some well-known properties.

Kicking off the year in style is ***Red Sonja*** from writer Amy Chu with Carlos Gomez in an updating of the She Devil With A Sword: she finds herself mystically transported to modern-day New York City, facing off against cops with guns and trying to find out just who dumped her there and why.

In February we get ***John Carter: The End***, from Brian Wood, Alex Cox and Hayden Sherman, billed as a "John Carter story like you've never seen before" and featuring an aged John Carter and Dejah Thoris – who somehow have to throw off the shackles of age and grief as once again they are the last hope of Mars.

BOOM!

Crossing over with DC is ***Planet Of The Apes/Green Lantern*** – a six-

Above left: Can love conquer all? Find out in *Empowered and the Soldier of Love* from Dark Horse.

Above right: A range of artists tackle a variety of characters in the *Black Hammer Annual* this month.

issue miniseries by Robbie Thompson, Justin Jordan and Barnaby Bagenda. Cornelius discovers a mysterious ring. Lantern fans can probably guess the rest.

Another promising miniseries comes from Bens Acker and Blacker, Andrew Miller and Hannah Christenson. ***Death Be Damned*** is a supernatural western that tells the story of Miranda, a woman who is killed – but comes back from beyond the grave seeking revenge. This looks like tootin' tootin' gunslinging fun with ghoulish art.

TITAN

Titan Comics continues its winning formula of adaptations of TV shows, movies and games as well as original material throughout 2017. There are a number of interesting titles on the horizon that have yet to have creative teams announced. These include: ***Supermansion***, based on the hit animated superhero comedy, starring *Breaking Bad*'s Bryan Cranston; a new outing for the Pilot

"RED SONJA FINDS HERSELF FACING COPS WITH GUNS"

AMY CHU

WRITER OF DYNAMITE'S KISS SERIES...

CH: You're writing a KISS series for Dynamite Entertainment... How did that come about?
AC: First off, Gene Simmons is a *huge* comics reader – and that's really why we have 40 years of KISS comics. He vets everything, which is kind of mindblowing. With so many KISS stories dating back to the '70s, I had to work really hard to come up with something new. I'm trying to do a story that's enjoyable for both KISS and non-KISS fans, but ultimately I'm really writing to impress Gene. And no, there is no blood in this comic [KISS famously provided blood samples which were mixed with the ink for the first *Marvel Super Special* KISS comic]. Everyone keeps asking. They did that in 1977. I'm sure that would never be allowed now. This isn't a horror story – I would say it's pretty straight-up science-fiction adventure.

CH: What about Red Sonja? How do you go about bringing something fresh to such a long running character like that?
AC: Well, it's no secret now, but I'm bringing her into the modern day world, specifically New York City. She's still the same Sonja, but in a different setting. It's really a test of her character as we see how she adapts... and doesn't. Of course she has to make some friends, so I'm bringing in a whole cast of new characters including a young cop, a bartender, a cosplayer...

CH: You've written an *X-Files* comic starring Fox's sister Samantha... Was that fun to do?
AC: Hugely fun. It's an alternate world where Fox is abducted by aliens and his sister becomes Scully's partner. But I have to confess it started off really stressful – I'm a huge fan of *The X-Files* and when I found out Chris Carter had to approve the script, I almost died...

CH: Imagine that any comic book company opens their properties book and says "Pick a character, any character". Who would you go for, and why?
AC: I loved writing Poison Ivy for DC, but I am currently really, really intrigued by Killer Croc. Like Poison Ivy, it's a character that's been around with kind of a messed-up and spotty backstory and lots of room for character development.

CH: Apart from your own, are there any comics you're really excited about seeing in 2017?
AC: Very excited to see Francesco Francavilla write and draw *Will Eisner's The Spirit* for Dynamite. I loved what he did with *The Black Beetle* [published by Dark Horse] a few years ago and was always hoping he would write more.

of the Future. ***Dani Dare***, which "charts new territory for the classic character", and a new comic series based on the cult 1980s anime ***Robotech***.

Khaal, from writer Louis and artist Valentin Secher, is an ultraviolent space opera of warring clans, and ***Lost Fleet***, featuring new stories based on writer Jack Campbell's novels of the same name, is written by Campbell with art by Andrew Stregar.

Also, Titan's successful hook-up with noir crime publishers Hard Case Crime continues with ***(re) Assignment***, which brings to English for the first time the comic book from Walter Hill (director of *The Warriors*, Marvel and let which inspired the upcoming Neo-Noir movie starring Michelle Rodriguez (*Fast & Furious*) and Sigourney Weaver (*Aliens*).

Hugely exciting is the first comic book outing for Kim Newman's alternate history vampire series ***Anno Dracula***, with all-new stories written by Newman and art by Doctor Who illustrator Paul McCaffrey.

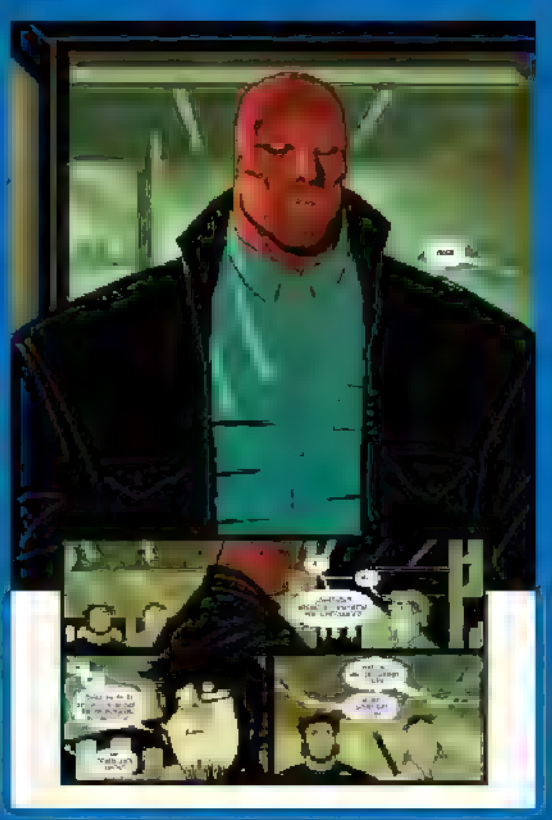
AFTERSHOCK

New kid on the block AfterShock begins the year with a couple of interesting new titles and their launch books going from strength to strength.

Fresh for January is ***Blood Blister*** #1 by Phil Hester and Tony Harris, with colours by Guy Major, which we're promised "opens a jarring window on to a world of horror" as corrupt Brandon Hull finds his sins manifesting themselves outwardly on his body.

And there's a new Rough Riders series from Adam Glass, Pat Oliffe >

Below: Just another typical day in the Supermansion, coming from Titan.



and Gabs Eltaeb, ***Rough Riders: Riders On The Storm*** picks up the story three years after the last tale. New president Roosevelt must get Harry Houdini, Jack Johnson, Thomas Edison and Annie Oakley back in the saddle to combat what could be a world-wide conspiracy.

Brian Azzarello and Juan Doe's ***American Monster*** continues its story of a horribly-scarred man who may be a hero... or the worst villain ever, while Marguerite Bennett and Rafael de Latorre's ***Animosity*** delves further into a world where the animals have finally had enough of humans. Who can blame 'em?

REBELLION

It's a very big year for ***2000 AD***. The Galaxy's Greatest Comic is only going to turn 40 in February! Seems like only yesterday we were sticking those bionic transfers on our forearms and losing our #1 free gift the Space Spinner over the neighbour's garden wall – see our feature on page 62. But the Oxford-based publisher isn't just about the weekly Prog. April will bring a reprint of John Wagner, Alan Grant and Mick McMahon's ***The Last American***. This post-apocalyptic tale follows Captain Ulysses S. Pilgrim after he awakes from suspended animation to

Above left: The animals finally strike back in the brilliantly-titled *Animosity* from AfterShock.

Top right: Body horror has a new name as AfterShock's *Blood Blister* inverts the Dorian Grey concept.

Above right: Hero or villain? *American Monster*, either way.

discover the world in a pretty rotten state. It has been out of print since 2004. And in July we'll see a new edition of the complete ***One-Eyed Jack***. Originally published in *Valiant* and then *Battle Picture Weekly*, this ultra-violent tale of a New York cop is a clear forerunner of Judge Dredd.

DRAWN & QUARTERLY

D&Q has become a watchword for quality graphic storytelling, and 2017 looks set to be a vintage year for them. Especially exciting is a new book from *This One Summer*'s Jillian Tamaki: ***Boundless***, scheduled for a June release, is a collection of

short stories exploring technology and sexuality.

Also turning in new work is Mimi Pond, who follows up her successful *Over Easy* book with another look at characters from her years waitressing in the late 1970s. ***The Customer Is Always Wrong*** lands in April.

In May, Seth serves up the long awaited 23rd instalment in his ***Palookaville*** series, a landmark moment as he brings the 20-year Clyde Fans storyline to a conclusion, while R. Sikoryak employs a wide variety of comic styles to try to explain the legal small-print behind iTunes... No, really. It's called ***Terms And Conditions*** and is out in March.

But before that, in February, we get a new Peter Bagge graphic novel! Following his new trend of quick-paced comics biography, ***FIRE!!*** profiles anthropologist and writer Zora Neale Hurston.

AVATAR PRESS

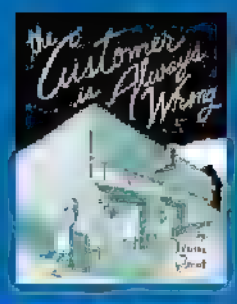
If you're a fan of Alan Moore's reinvention of H.P. Lovecraft's work in ***Providence***, then you might be interested in Avatar's hardcover collecting the first four issues plus the lush back matter... but be quick. Avatar is doing a single run in February of the 160-page book, and there will be no further printings. There will be Act 2 and Act 3 hardcovers throughout 2017, also limited.

Meanwhile, Moore's ***Purgatorio*** continues, his disturbing world of surreal cinema stories, with forthcoming issues featuring work by Kevin O'Neill, *World War Z* creator Max Brooks, with German Ponce, Kieron Gillen and Nahuel Lopez's ***Modded***, and ***Code Pru*** by Garth Ennis and Raulo Caceres.

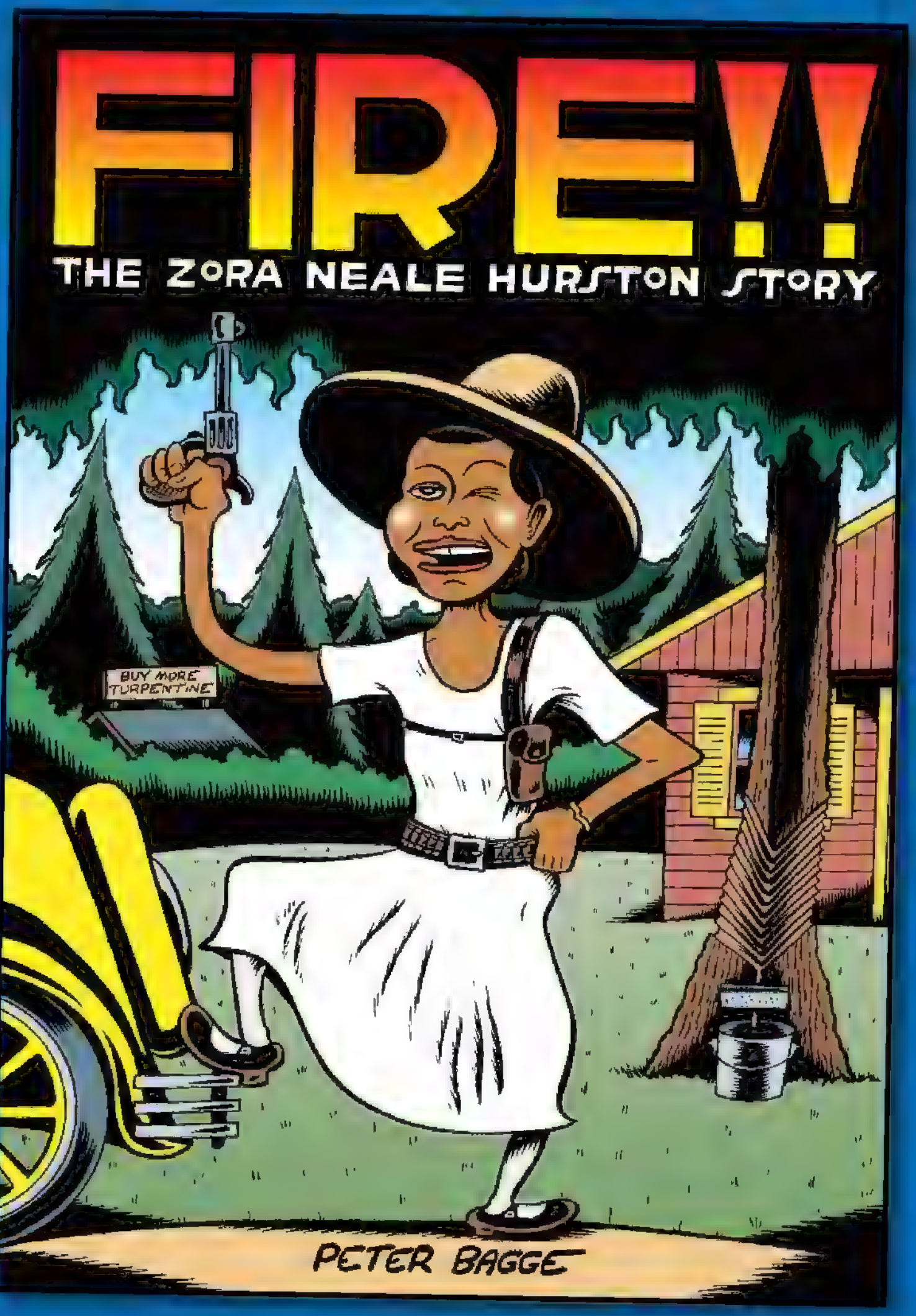
Speaking of Gillen, his and Daniel Gete's return to the Uber alternate world is underway in a new series, ***Uber: Invasion***. Throughout 2017 Gillen and Gete will be fleshing out their world where the Nazis turned the tide of the war with enhanced soldiers. Having conquered Europe with his monsters, Hitler is now turning his sights on America, and unless they can come up with some super soldiers of their own they face doom.

ARCHIE

With the all-American perpetual



Below: Peter Bagge proves he's lost none of his off-the-wall slant on the world in *FIRE!!*, coming from Drawn & Quarterly.

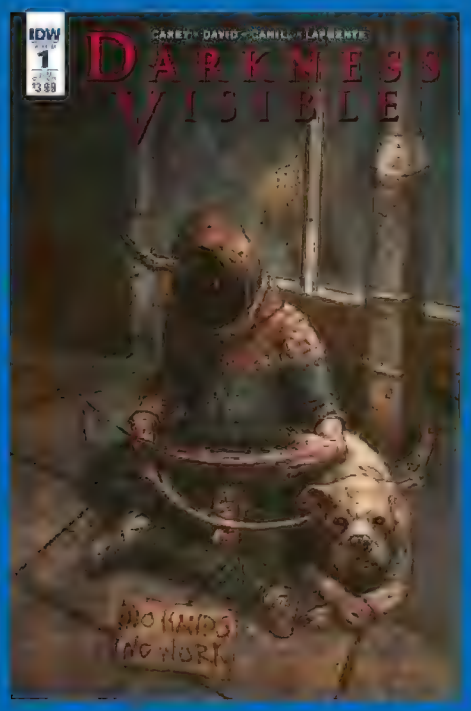


teens set for a brand new audience thanks to the upcoming TV series *Riverdale*, the Archie gang have a pile of new releases set for 2017 including ***Riverdale***, a one shot in February written by Roberto Aguirre Sacasa with art by Alitha Martinez. It should make perfect introduction to Archie, Jughead, Betty and Veronica if the eternal Spring Breakers have

somehow passed you by. ***The Archies*** one-shot, meanwhile, written by Alex Segura and Matthew Rosenberg with art by Joe Eisma, follows Archie's rock ambitions.

March will also see the launch of the ***Riverdale*** ongoing series, again written by Aguirre-Sacasa (who's also penning the TV series), which is set in the TV universe and promises "bubbling darkness".

In Archie's horror line the last couple of years, there was darkness aplenty. However, new one-off issue featuring ***Sabrina The Teenage Witch*** looks to not build on that, but to position Sabrina back in the main Archie-verse, with friends, boys and parties the order of the day – rather than Lovecraftian horror. Still, a witch has gotta kick back like everyone else...



IDW

Fresh from literary and cinematic success with *The Girl With All the Gifts*, Mike Carey (*Lucifer*) returns to comics with ***Darkness Visible*** in Spring, co-written with Arvind Ethan David (*Dirk Gently's Holistic Detective Agency*) and with art by Brendan Cahill. The series posits a world where demons emerged into the Earthly plane 80 years ago and began an uneasy co-existence with humanity. Cop Daniel Aston polices the shadowy border between human affairs and demonic doings.

Cosmic Scoundrels, a five-part miniseries from Andy Suriano and Matt Chapman, takes the action to outer space, where Love Savage and Roshambo are a couple of bros trying to earn a living and keep on the right side of the law... where possible. With alien gangsters, drugs and black market baby trafficking, this has "caper" written all over it.

Who wants to live forever? The Highlander franchise, evidently... It's back in comic form thanks to Brian Ruckley and Andrew Mutti in ***Highlander: The American Dream***, in which Connor MacLeod swings his sword through the American Civil War and '50s New York on his way to the head-lopping of 1986, as featured in the original movie.

Above left: Kinda-real (but not) pop stars *The Archies* return in a one-shot in 2017.

Above right: Mike Carey and friends usher us into a new world of *Darkness Visible*, from IDW.

Below left: Sub cover for the first issue of *Darkness Visible*.

Opposite: So why *is* Jughead always so hungry? There's a chilling new answer in the *Jughead* one-shot from Archie...

"MACLEOD SWINGS A SWORD THROUGH '50s NEW YORK"

R

WILD AT HEART

STEPHEN JEWELL FINDS OUT ABOUT THE NEW HERO INSIDE THE INVINCIBLE IRON ARMOUR

Ever since the introduction of the Fantastic Four and Spider-Man in the early 1960s, Marvel Comics has always tried to reflect the society we live in. Now, following Jane Foster's Thor and Amadeus Cho's Totally Awesome Hulk, there's a new Armoured Avenger. After first appearing in May 2016 in the previous run of *Invincible Iron Man*, African-American teenager Riri Williams has taken on the mantle of Iron Man.

"One of my goals with Iron Man was to give him more of a supporting cast," says Brian Michael Bendis, who has written for the character since October 2015. "For his stature in comics, Tony has a surprisingly tight-knit group of characters around him, especially if you compare him or Batman or Spider-Man. I wanted to add some new flavours and ideas and people into his life, so the idea of a super genius blowing right past him was something I really wanted to try.

"I started thinking about what kind of person could blow past Tony," continues Bendis, who previously researched gifted children and genius behaviour for his creator-owned Icon title *Brilliant*. "I won't say that I had always planned for her to take over the book, because I did not. It just happened organically due to the events in Civil War II and other places..."

"Brian came up with the initial idea for Riri at the very beginning of his Iron Man run as simply an MIT student who had cracked the secret of Tony's armour, forcing him to up his game and to develop a new, more cutting-edge version of the technology," adds Marvel Executive Editor Tom Brevoort. "But as things went along, the character took on a greater and greater role, with the intention of her becoming an armoured hero in her own right. It was only when we got into Civil War II and realised that Tony would be taken off the canvas at the conclusion of it, that it became a natural thing for Riri to step into his metal boots as his successor."

Opposite and below: Series penciller Stefano Caselli and issue 2 variant cover artist Mike Deodato capture the spirit and the exuberance of Ironheart.

Riri taking the lead came organically, says Bendis. "It's simply a case of the creators and editors looking at the comics and then looking outside our windows, and sometimes realising that the two don't reflect each other," says Bendis. "Opening these books and seeing >

people from different walks of life and different origins is a reflection of the world I see. I also know that there are so many stories not being represented, so that inspires me to add to it whenever I can."

His own family includes two adopted daughters, and Bendis says the book is reflecting his own experiences. "Being a father has affected my work every day of my life for the last 14 years," he admits. "Any parent will tell you it affects you, and what you do and how you do it."

Bendis explains the origins of Riri's backstory, in which her step-dad and her best friend Natalie are gunned down in a drive-by shooting in her hometown of Chicago. "I spent a great deal of time in Chicago when we were filming the original *Powers* pilot," he says, referring to the television series of his long-running creator-owned book with Michael Avon Oeming, which recently came to an end after two seasons on the PlayStation Network. "Riding my bike around during both the day and the night, I absolutely fell in love with the city, and certainly felt that if there were superheroes then Chicago would have some." However, Bendis adds, "I'm also horrified by the weekly headlines of the insane amount of random shootings that happen there. A family walks down the street and the mother is shot in the back, and no-one even knows where the bullet came from. I will never understand how this is referenced as normal – it's insane. I write about things that I don't understand in an attempt to understand this world that we live in. This is the world that Riri lives in and her origin reflects that."

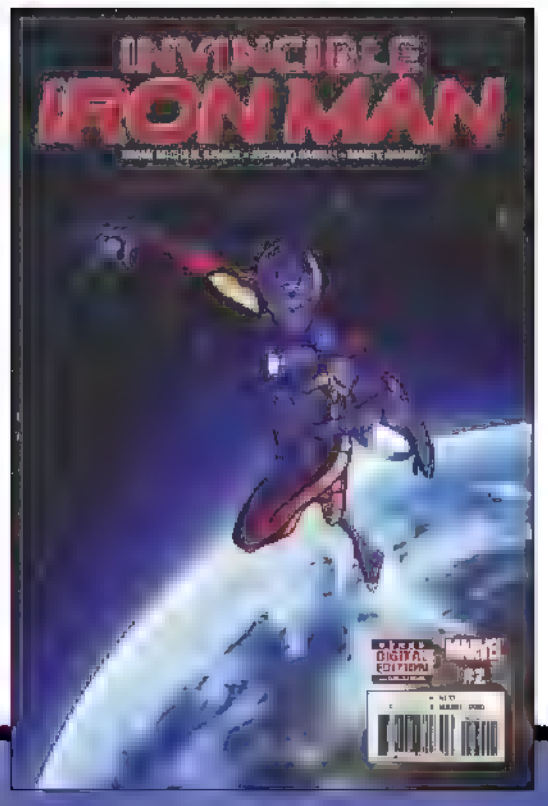
Above: As we learn more about her origin in issue 2, Riri, in her bulky grey armour, finds herself sharing the sky with a whole crowd of Iron Men

Below: Thrilling cover to *Invincible Iron Man* #2 by Stefano Caselli

BIG HEARTED

As seen in *Invincible Iron Man* #1, her friendship with Natalie had enabled the young Riri to come out of her shell and not devote herself entirely to building robots in her makeshift lab. Consequently, the untimely death of perhaps her only friend has a profound impact upon her. "I love how everyone is concerned for Riri's mental health and ability to relate to people – I get questions like this from fans all the time, and they just want to know that she's

"RIRI IS INTELLIGENT BUT SHE IS 15 YEARS OLD. INEXPERIENCE WILL LEAD HER TO MAKE MISTAKES"



going to be okay," says Bendis. "I promise you that the book will not shy away from these subjects, and we will discover in upcoming issues that she is far from over Natalie's death."

Despite her intellect, it should be remembered, Riri is still an adolescent. "This will definitely be an ongoing concern in the series – Riri is more intelligent than people many times her age, but emotionally she is only 15 years old," says Brevoort. "And that inexperience will lead her to make mistakes on occasion."

"Being a one-of-a-kind sometimes brings with it alienation and isolation, and sometimes people alienate themselves without even realising it," adds Bendis. "Anybody who wants to be really good at what they do will spend a lot of time getting good at that thing. So what you may gain in craft and expertise, you might lose in social skills. Riri is really young and is just starting out, but just because she's solitary now doesn't mean that she won't learn and grow and find more people that she connects with."

Riri's troubled upbringing also informs her choice of moniker: Brevoort hints that "the reason for Riri adopting that particular codename is part of the story and the journey, and you'll learn more about it in *Invincible Iron Man* #3." In the real world, the title is actually Marvel Chief Creative Officer Joe Quesada's handiwork.

HEART OF THE MATTER

"Myself and the editors were struggling to come up with a name that was maybe a little more clever or meaningful than Iron Woman, which felt kind of dated," says Bendis. "We were emailing back and forth, and Joe asked me for more background into her origin, so I described the horrible tragedy that happened to her and how her best friend died with these terrible wounds to her heart, so now she's building armour and maybe not even realising the connection. Joe just said 'Ironheart,' and that's the genius of Joe. He doesn't get enough credit for all of the little ideas and big ideas he has given to many creators over the years."

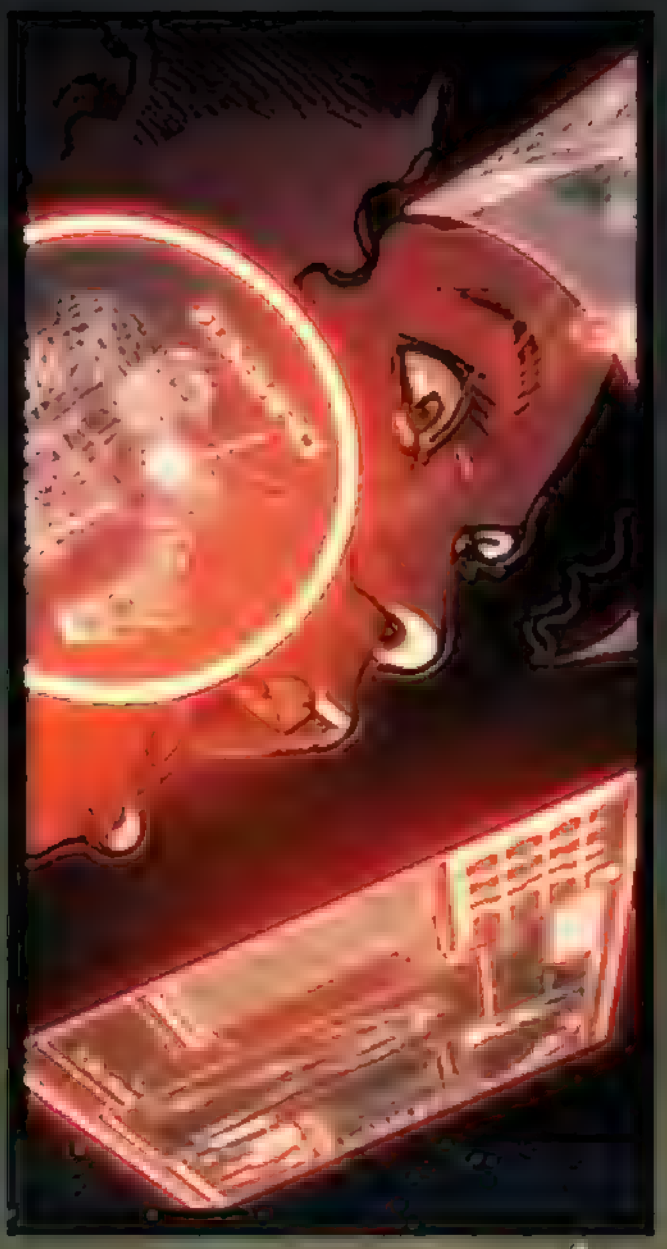
Without her predecessor's privileged background, Riri could actually be smarter than Tony Stark was at that tender age. "Tony has already acknowledged that Riri is more accomplished than he was back then, but that's less to do with a question of money than a question of drive," Bendis argues. "Riri is motivated by the sort of personal tragedy that a similarly-aged Tony had not yet experienced, and that has driven her to do more in a shorter amount of time, because she is acutely aware that it could all end without warning at any moment."

With Brevoort noting that "her mother is critical to the series," Riri will also form vital relationships with existing members of the extended Iron Man cast including Mary Jane Watson, Pepper Potts and Amanda Armstrong. "Riri is taking her first steps into a larger

THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH HER
IT'S QUITE THE OPPOSITE ACTUALLY
QUITE THE OPPOSITE
THESE BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS THAT YOU CLAIMED UP ARE DUE TO THE FACT THAT SHE'S BORED
BORED?
SHE'S FIVE YEARS OLD
SHE HAS TOYS, SHE HAS TV, WHEN I WAS A KID
YOUR DAUGHTER HAS TESTED AT THE EVEL WHAT THEY NOW REFER TO AS SUPER GENIUS.
THERE WAS GENIUS AND NOW THERE IS STILO SUPER GENIUS
I DON'T THINK YOU HAVE TO BE A SUPER GENIUS TO FIGURE OUT WHAT THAT MEANS
SHE'S BORED BECAUSE SHE'S SMARTER THAN YOU SMARTER THAN ME
AND YOU ARE GIVING HER SESAME STREET PEANUTS AND APPLE JUICE IN A CARDBOARD BOX
SHE IS ACTING UP OUT OF BOREDOM

Above left: This variant cover for #1 by Jeff Dekal hints at the role Tony Stark will play as Riri steps up to the plate

Above: Riri Williams's origin story involves personal tragedy but also the difficulties of growing up a genius



world, and readers will get to go along on the journey," he says, revealing that Riri will be having her "coming-out party" in the next few issues of *Invincible Iron Man*.

"You'll get to experience her first encounters with the other key players in the Marvel Universe, heroes and villains alike, and experience her own unique and specific take on becoming a part of the superhero fraternity."

Despite being "off the canvas", Tony Stark will continue to play a role in the book, even if he won't actually appear in the flesh. "In the previous *Invincible Iron Man* run, we explored how Tony was pushing himself to explore the very outer boundaries of what his creative mind was able to accomplish," says Brevoort. "So after having gotten such fun mileage out of Tony's interactions with his own AI Friday, it seemed all the more enjoyable to give Riri her own AI, and to give it Tony's personality."

HEART OF STARKNESS

"At the moment, she looks up to Tony Stark," adds Bendis. "She knows he knows things that she doesn't know and wants to know. And although their personalities may end up not being fully in sync, they both really need each other. But she's growing fast, so we will see where this takes her."

Riri will also eventually cross paths with Victor Von Doom, who has taken on the task of becoming a more sinister Shellhead in *Infamous Iron Man*.

"I've written double titles before and it's sometimes difficult to keep focus on what's unique about each title," admits Bendis. "With Victor and Riri in juxtaposition, the books will never feel the same, even when they inevitably clash."

While Bendis's former *International Iron Man* artistic partner Alex Maleev is assigned to *Infamous Iron Man*, the task of illustrating Riri's adventures is now in the hands of Stefano Caselli (*Avengers*, *Secret Warriors*). "Stefano is a top-flight superhero artist, who is contemporary, stylish and polished," says Brevoort. "He's also got a killer grasp of character acting, and his expressions and body language recall the heyday of artists such as Kevin Maguire. As such, he invests Riri with such personality and such heart that a reader can't help but fall in love with her even before they read the stories. *Invincible Iron Man* represents a great leap forward for him, and I think people are going to associate him with Riri just as strongly as they do Brian, and possibly even more." CH

Opposite: More action from Issue 2 by Stefano Caselli

This page: ... And equal focus on Riri herself inside and on the variant cover by Anthony Piper

"YOU'LL EXPERIENCE HER FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH KEY PLAYERS IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE"

McFARLANE
BUMAGE COVER

SPAWNING AN EMPIRE

Todd McFarlane is many things to many people. **Russell Sheath** meets the artist, entrepreneur, music video director, producer, and co-founder of Image Comics...

Comics is an industry where the title "icon" is bestowed all too readily, but the true test is this: you can simply utter their first name and everyone knows who you are talking about. So there's Stan, Jack, Frank, Alan... and there's Todd. There is no doubt that Todd McFarlane is a comic book icon.

McFarlane's story is well chronicled. A star athlete in college with a professional sports career ahead of him, the Canadian-born McFarlane abandoned baseball for his first major comics work in the early '80s, pencilling *Infinity Inc* and *Detective Comics* for DC. McFarlane soon moved to Marvel and *The Incredible Hulk*, adding his own stamp to iconic characters and turning heads in the process. Developing a trademark "super-exaggerated" art style that caught the mood of the moment, the emerging artist's popularity soared after he embarked on a character-redefining run on *The Amazing Spider-Man*.

McFarlane pencilled and wrote the adjective-less *Spider-Man*, a brand new title created to showcase his talents in 1990. With some canny (and ruthless) marketing, it sold in unprecedented numbers, but McFarlane began to grow frustrated at what he perceived as editorial

Right: McFarlane began making a name for himself at his run with Peter David and other writers on *The Incredible Hulk*

interference, which eventually led him to seek independence for himself and his work, away from the growing corporate mentality of the big two publishers.

The birth of Image Comics has become something of a comic book legend. When, in 1991, Marvel's seven top artists, at the height of their popularity, struck out to form their own company, McFarlane was often heralded as the ringleader of the group.

"I wouldn't call myself the leader," McFarlane offers from the Arizona HQ of his comics and toy empire. "The initial spark that became Image actually came from Rob Liefeld and Erik Larsen.

"Rob and Erik were talking about leaving Marvel and doing their own stuff, while at the same time I was talking about quitting *Spider-Man*. All of a sudden the conversation turned to us banding together and having power in numbers, after which we got Marc Silvestri, Jim Lee, Whilce Portacio and Jim Valentino to join us."

Of his role in the formation of Image Comics, McFarlane says: "We all had a voice, but I guess I'm not shy in voicing my opinions, which could be translated as my taking a leadership role. As I've gotten older I've become more comfortable with being in actual leadership roles because sometimes being a leader is about saying what everyone is thinking but are too polite to say. I am getting too old for any of that. I don't have time for it."

Image Comics turned the industry on its head with a relentless march of hit comics from each of the founding artists. Image books topped the charts, making the seven creators famous and infamous in equal measure.

DOING THE BUSINESS

"When we started Image, the one thing that none of us were was businessmen, which would prove to be our major fault," suggests McFarlane, revisiting an era when several of the Image founders launched studios, including Jim Lee's Wildstorm and Marc Silvestri's Top Cow. Venturing into business deals and numerous distractions saw Image, in its heyday, being synonymous with late and cancelled comics, as several of the founders struggled to balance creating a monthly comic (or in some cases several comics) with the demands of starting and running a business.

In many ways Todd McFarlane stood apart from the other Image founding fathers. Arguably the most acclaimed artist of the group, he didn't nurture new talent, develop a studio or launch numerous titles. Instead, he focused initially on learning the language of business.

"For me, I really did approach going into business like I was learning a second language, and when you learn a second language it's because there's some value to you doing that. For me, the value of learning business fluently was so that I could drive my artwork further."

McFarlane did go on to launch several companies spanning the worlds of multi-media entertainment, publishing and toys, but before this, for his first Image Comics offering, he returned to a concept he had created in high school. Far from the wisecracking, wallcrawler who had launched the artist to comics superstardom, the new character McFarlane unleashed on the world emerged as a dark fantasy anti-hero, Spawn.

While Image co-founders Jim Lee and Marc Silvestri would look to duplicate the success they had

Above: Critics complained that Spawn was taking comics in a cynical direction, but the character was a hit.

Below: If anything, McFarlane's art became steadily more mannered and stylised, and some objected that the writing took a back seat to the art, but sales held up well.

at Marvel with team-based superhero books, McFarlane chose to apply his new-found business acumen to drive his character in a less obvious direction.

"I knew I wanted to create a character that gave me options," McFarlane reflects. "With Spawn, I could do straight-up superhero stuff but I could also do horror, espionage or a love story if I wanted. I didn't know when I would throw any of those switches, I just knew that if I got tired of drawing the same thing over and over, I could go into something else to refresh me, before returning to what, at its core, was a superhero comic book."

The first issue of *Spawn* in May 1992 sold 1.7 million copies, breaking all sales records for an independent comic, and to this day *Spawn* remains one of the longest running independent comic books.

All of the Image founders would find themselves distracted with numerous Hollywood deals or launching multiple titles, but McFarlane's efforts, with a few notable exceptions such as a partnership with rock legends KISS, were Spawn-centric.

"The thing is that we as humans aren't very good at is having tunnel vision. I guess I'm kind of myopic in that regard," offers McFarlane, who still remains focused largely on keeping things very much under his control. "I'm like a dog. If you give me a bone I just gnaw on it and I don't worry about the second bone. Over the years I learnt that I was only ever a four ball juggler. I can't juggle five balls, and when I tried to juggle five balls I found I was doing a disservice to everything else because I was spreading myself too thin. So, what I have to do is decide what are the four things that I'm adamant about and then, when a new opportunity comes along, I have to decide which of the four balls that I'm currently juggling to lay down, so I can insert that new opportunity.

"When you are trying to grow and accomplish things you tend to say 'yes' to everything and what that means is, you have to learn a word that people who are new to business have to learn and that word is 'no'. I'd rather do a little really well rather than a lot on an average basis."

THE POWER OF THE BRAND

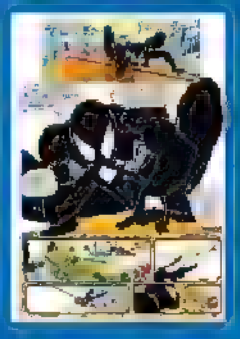
McFarlane's business is now a toy, comics and media production powerhouse, but despite this, when you visit the McFarlane website you see right next to Todd's name the logo of the character who started it all, Spawn. McFarlane realised early on that as much as the characters he would bring to life were effective brands, he himself as an artist and creator was as essential to his own success as the characters he creates.

"One of the guys I looked at early on was Walt Disney," explains McFarlane. "There was Disneyland, Disney World and the Disney Channel, where Walt Disney himself was introducing the TV show, which I would watch as a kid. I connected with the person as well as the brand, and with Disney, Walt himself gave you a face to connect with what you were purchasing. Besides creating lots and lots of stuff, Disney also created a confidence in what he created, and the thing I marvel at, even 40 years after his death, is what Disney has blossomed into, which is something Walt Disney himself may not have even been able to conceive of.

"Disney's original baby, Mickey Mouse, is still with us. So my thinking was that if I could create my own Mickey Mouse in Spawn, something that a small fraction of the population would still hunger for after I'm dead, then I'm happy. I've succeeded."

There's no doubt that McFarlane is hugely successful, not only as an artist but also as a businessman. Often called upon to lecture to business students and provide an insight into how he developed his business acumen, McFarlane is keen to show that he

Above: *Spawn* was not the first Image title to appear but its record 1.7 million sales proved that Image was here to stay. McFarlane was, too, although he stopped pencilling it after the first two years, he wrote and drew 72 straight issues of the series.



> "IF I CAN CREATE MY OWN MICKEY MOUSE, A THING PEOPLE STILL WANT AFTER I'M DEAD, I'VE SUCCEEDED"

--I'M GETTING SOME HELP!

is forward focused, with as many years ahead as there are behind him. Having weathered the highs and lows of interest in comics, McFarlane remains optimistic about his – and Spawn's – future. As he explains, "A couple of years ago I was having to work really hard in terms of both the creative and business side of things, but now there seems to be a shift towards quality and geekdom, both of which are in my sweet spot. There are a lot of opportunities coming out at a much faster rate than they have in the last few years. I recently took three meetings where Hollywood is asking for me to be involved in big movies by big people. I don't know if we'll sign the deals, but the fact that there are people out there saying that they don't want the Fortune 500 companies, but that they want strong content and that desire for strong content led them to me. I feel a bit like I did 20 years ago, where there's lots of opportunities. Lots of businesses go in cycles and right now I feel we are in an upward cycle."

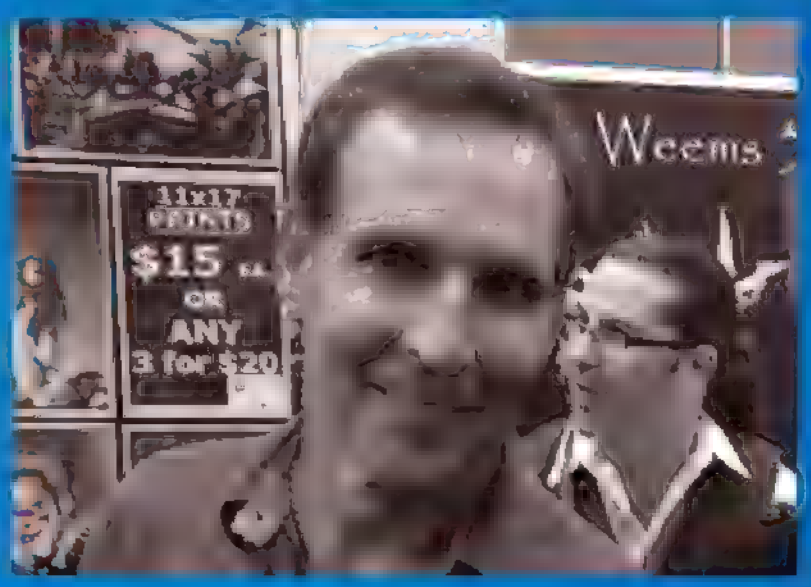
BACK TO THE FUTURE

So McFarlane is optimistic, not just for himself but for comics in general. For Spawn, McFarlane has teased for several years that he has been working on a script for a new Spawn feature and, as he speaks of what excites him at the cinema these days, we can perhaps gain an insight into what that Spawn movie as well as future McFarlane offerings might look like.

"I think that movies like *Unbreakable*, where essentially we were introduced to a quasi-Superman but who looked like the guy next door, I think that's a smart way to bring your ideas to the audience. Once you put Spandex on characters, it's easy for people to walk away, because it's not everybody's cup of tea. But done right, you might be able to take those concepts, tweak them and make them look normal, but they aren't. If I were to create a new property right now, I would say that it would continue to push the boundaries of the definition of fantasy, while still making it live in the real world."

Ultimately, no matter how successful he is or how diverse his businesses and opportunities may become, McFarlane is still an artist who occasionally yearns for a time when all he had to do was sit at a table and just draw.

"It would be kind of cool to go back to my roots and just do art. At my core I am a creative person and an artist," he declares. "People ask me if I thrive on being a businessman and the answer is no. I only thrive on it for as long as being a businessman allows me to put art into the marketplace and let people see that art. Every minute I'm doing business, I'm not being creative. When I'm going into a meeting with bankers or going to China to make sure the toys are right, all of that is necessary to do the commerce I am doing and is a means to an end to get my art out there, in different forms. If you could clone me and let Todd the clone do the business side, so I could focus on being an artist, I'd do that. I think it will shift as I get older and I'll just want to do art again and things will come full circle for me." CH



Opposite: McFarlane's take on Spider-Man is still instantly recognisable, with its huge eyes, contorted pose and 'spaghetti webbing'

EMPIRE BUILDING
Todd McFarlane's Greatest Hits

1. Spawn
Spider-Man launched Todd McFarlane's artistic career, but it's Spawn, the character he created while still in high school, who built his empire. The best selling independent comic book of all time, the title also ranks among the longest running, unbroken, comic book series of all time and remains at the centre of the McFarlane identity and brand.

2. Todd McFarlane's Spawn: The Animated Series
McFarlane teamed up with HBO, the studio behind *Game of Thrones*, to bring audiences a gritty, adult and hard-edged interpretation of Spawn in animated form. Drawing upon the comic series for inspiration, the series ran to 18 episodes over three seasons and won several awards, including two Emmys.

3. Pearl Jam – Do The Evolution Video

Success in animation made Todd McFarlane the go-to guy for a number of rock bands, including Disturbed and Korn, seeking to add unique visuals to their music. Legendary Seattle rockers Pearl Jam sought out McFarlane, along with acclaimed *Batman The Animated Series* director Kevin Altieri, to work with singer Eddie Vedder, co-directing the video to accompany "Do The Evolution", taken from the band's 1998 album *Yield*. The video would go on to be nominated for a Grammy for Best Music Video.

4. Spawn The Movie

Of all the efforts by the Image founders to bring their properties to the big (and small) screen, McFarlane was the only one to find success with 1997's *Spawn The Movie*. Starring martial artist Michael Jai White (*Black Dynamite*) in the title role, the film also featured Martin Sheen, John Leguizamo and *Gotham* and *The O.C.* star Melinda Clarke. Featuring eye-melting and (for the time) groundbreaking visual effects, the film was a moderate box office success. McFarlane still teases fans with his efforts to bring Spawn to the big screen again.

5. McFarlane Toys

When other toy companies couldn't deliver the vision that he demanded, McFarlane decided to create his own toy company to bring his creations into three dimensions. At a time when action figures had been following the same formula for years, McFarlane broke all the rules, offering scale, value and detail previously unseen in toys. McFarlane Toys became a licensing powerhouse to include figures from movies, sports and music with major licences including *Game of Thrones* and *The Walking Dead* among others.

40 YEARS OF THRILL POWER!

The Galaxy's Greatest Comic turns 40 this year. Stephen Jewell and Will Salmon celebrate 40 moments, characters and series we've loved from over 2,000 Progs...

SLAINE: THE HORNED GOD

2000 AD's longest-running fantasy saga was created in 1983 by the original Tharg, Pat Mills. It reached its apotheosis, however, in 1989 and this story. After his pen-and-ink work on ABC Warriors' "The Black Hole," Simon Bisley's fully painted art on "The Horned God" represented a massive sea change on *2000 AD*. With the collected edition becoming one of *2000 AD*'s best selling graphic novels ever, Slaine even challenged Judge Dredd's popularity. And with Bisley inspiring a whole new generation of artists to pick up their brushes, "The Horned God" was instrumental in the comic going full colour throughout.

Left: Simon Bisley made his name – and blew readers' minds – with his stunning painted art for Slaine: The Horned God

THE ABC WARRIORS

ABC Warriors – "Atomic, Bacterial and Chemical" – debuted in Prog 119, growing naturally out of final Ro-Busters storyline "Fall and Rise of Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein". The story of a group of war robots (typically Hammerstein, Joe Pineapples, Deadlock, Blackblood and Mongrol, with others joining and leaving at different points in the series' history), it soon evolved into an exploration of war, (non-) human rights and mysticism – which became more pronounced

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when the characters encountered Nemesis the Warlock. It's also indirectly responsible for the only good bit in the Stallone Dredd movie, where a robot that looks a lot like Hammerstein is activated.

THAT LOGO

You know the one. It wasn't the comic's first masthead – in fact it was the *fourth* – but the double-stacked version is justly famous, and ran from Prog 555 to Prog 949 with only minor tweaks. In the mid-'90s, when the comic lost its mind for a bit, it changed to a far duller one, designed to big up Dredd's presence. Thankfully, sanity was restored and the double-stacked logo, the *real* logo, made a triumphant return in Prog 1234 and it remains to this day.

JUDGE DREDD

Judge Joe Dredd, the lawman of the future, is the beating heart of *2000 AD*. Created by John Wagner and Carlos Ezquerra – who still chronicle many of his adventures – Ol' Stony Face has been a fixture since Prog 2. A true pop culture icon, despite the fact we never see his face, he is the unbreakable arm of the law in future metropolis Mega-City One. Both hero and anti-hero, his unflinchingly fascist attitudes – horrifying to our eyes – have made him the perfect vehicle to explore questions of democracy, justice, power and morality. Often Dredd is barely impacted by the events aroud him – he's a device in which to view this crazy world.

Plus, his stories are usually a highlight of any given Prog. Dredd has seen it all: Dark Judges from alternate dimensions, crazed psycho-hillbillies, and his own, deranged clone brother, Rico. He's saved Mega-City One on countless occasions. On the other hand, his rigid devotion to duty has often led to the loss of innocent lives (500 million of them in the Apocalypse War). But because we've followed him in real time (a year in our world is a year in the Dreddverse), we've grown to know him and watch him develop into a (slightly) more complex being.

MEET the TOUGHEST LAWMAN of THEM ALL...
JUDGE DREDD
JUDGE
NEW YORK 2099 A.D.! WHERE NEXT STAR-SCRAPERS STAND ACHEST AND THE AIR SMELLS LIKE THE EVENING WORTE ARE IN RUINS. ONLY BOTH RAD VICIOUS ROCKHAMMERS!
AT THE TOP OF THE EMPIRE STATE, DENIZENS LOOK OUT AT A HUGE RIDE'S RIDING THE ROAD TOWARDS THEM
JUDGES ARE SPECIAL LAWMEN OF THE 22nd CENTURY ELECTED BY THE PEOPLE TO ENFORCE THE LAW!
LOOK! A JUDGE! HE'S COMING TO ARREST US, PARTEY!
GIMME RID! WE'LL DEAL WITH HIM... JUDGES CAN BLEED, TOO!
2000 AD
NEW THRILL

Above: An updated Dan Dare was the star of the first issue. It wasn't till #2 that this guy appeared, conceived as "Dirty Harry in the future". Wonder what became of him...?

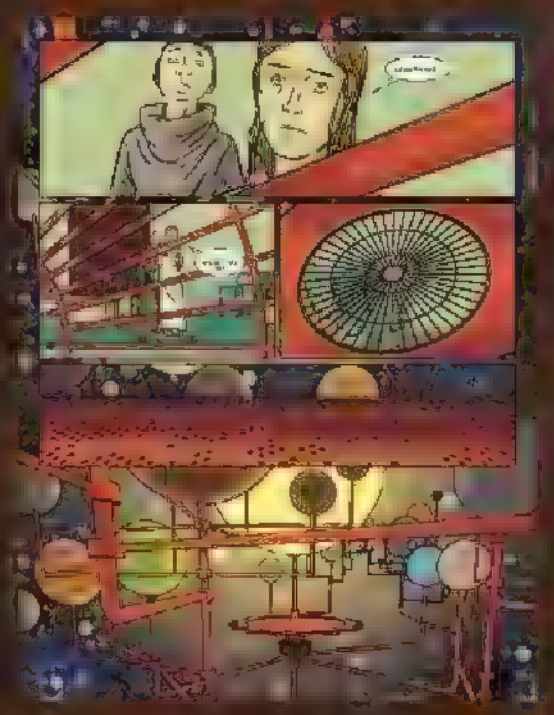
Below: An awesome steampunk orrery from Brass Sun, a landmark cover marks a heroic death in Dan Dare, and The Mighty One himself.

THE MIGHTY ONE HIMSELF

Forget Judge Dredd, Rogue Trooper or Strontium Dog – the real star of the Galaxy's Greatest Comic is The Mighty One. Apart from introducing the contents of the weekly Prog, everyone's favourite Betelgeusian editor has also featured in many of his own strips, starting with the Kevin O'Neill drawn "Tharg and the Intruders" in Prog 24 and most recently in the Mike Collins drawn "The Secret of 1977" in Prog 1977.

BRASS SUN

A recent classic, Ian Edginton and INJ Culbard's steampunk adventure follows Wren, a young girl on a quest to restart the sun at the heart of a mechanical solar system in a fantasy adventure that stands apart from the often ultra-violent *2000 AD* strips.



KIDS OF EARTH... WELCOME TO YOUR FUTURE!
2000 A.D.
8p
EARTH MONEY
FOLLOW ME INTO THE SUN... YOU WILL SHARE THE DEATH OF A MARTIAN WARRIOR

2000 AD's 40TH BIRTHDAY PROG

2000 AD editor Matt Smith was determined that next month's 40th Birthday issue, following barely four months after Prog 2000, would not repeat what had gone before. Showcasing a different line-up of classic characters – with the obvious exception of Judge Dredd – it instead focuses on one-off adventures of Sláine, Ro-Busters, Nikolai Dante, Zombo and Durham Red, all of which echo a specific theme.

"Since 40 years is a ruby anniversary, I asked the creators to give their strips a red motif," Smith explains. "John Wagner chose blood for his Dredd story with Carl Critchlow, while Pat Mills and Simon Davis have gone back to Slaine's teenage years to show how he joined the Red Branch – the elite caste of warriors of his tribe. Zombo fitted in with the red theme because of his red pants, and Nikolai Dante centres around a Fabergé ruby."

As in Prog 2000, there will once again be black-and-white, one-page interludes between the main stories, on this occasion drawn by Mark Sexton, Jock, Bryan Talbot, Patrick Goddard, Mike Collins and Rufus Dayglo. "They're a good way for different artists to contribute even if they can't commit to a whole story," says Smith. "This time they're framed like video messages from the characters wishing the prog a happy birthday."

With Smith describing him as "possibly the artist most associated with *2000 AD* and [the one] who has a presence in it for the longest time," Carlos Ezquerra was a natural choice for the cover, although David Aja (*Hawkeye*) supplies a Dredd-centric variant. "I asked Carlos to accommodate the red theme, so we've got Tharg's rosette, Johnny Alpha's badge and Dredd's visor picked out," Smith says of Ezquerra, who also draws a Durham Red story written by Zoo City novelist Lauren Beukes and her regular comics co-writer, Dale Halvorsen.

"I asked them to do that, as I knew Lauren was a fan of Strontium Dog in particular, and I thought it would be interesting to get a different voice on Red," continues Smith. "It's a snappy, old-school Red story, very bloody and blackly comic. I offered it to Carlos, and he was up for drawing it, which gave Lauren and Dale a real thrill when they heard since they're both fans from way back."

Left: If you insist that *2000 AD* stories must be sci-fi, you could say Button Man takes place in a kind of alternative world. Or not. We still think it's sheer brilliance

THE HARLEM HEROES

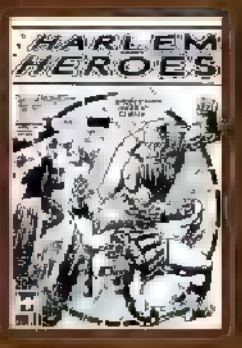
Masterfully drawn by Dave Gibbons, Harlem Heroes were a 21st century fusion of the Harlem Globetrotters. But while they faced the likes of the Bushido Blades and Flying Scotsmen in the Aeroball arena, their biggest challenge would come from vengeful cyborg Artie Gruber, who first took aim at team captain Giant in Prog 9.

BUTTON MAN

Button Man is one of only a handful of *2000 AD* tales with no fantastical, science fictional or horror elements. Instead, it's a gritty thriller based around the "Killing Game" – a trial by combat where a group of highly-paid assassins off each other for the amusement of anonymous "Voices". A brilliantly tense series, penned by John Wagner, it's really made by Arthur Ranson's beautiful art. It positions the series in the modern world – but a modern world that looks and feels like the best 1970s thriller ever made. Brutal, amoral and brilliant.

THE REIMAGINED DAN DARE

Artist Massimo Belardinelli's phantasmagorical rendition of The Pilot of the Future was light-years away from Frank Hampson's original 1950s *Eagle* incarnation. This Dan's main companion was not Digby but stoic Martian spaceship commander Mr. Monday, who bravely sacrificed himself, taking a final, fateful sun trip in Prog 11. Over 12 months in the telling, the 57-part "The Lost Worlds" was the highlight of Dan Dare's troubled *2000 AD* stint. With the sleeker Dave Gibbons taking over art duties, Dare and crewmates Hitman, Bear and Pilot Polanski embarked on a perilous *Star Trek* inspired mission in Prog 28 to establish what had happened to some missing colonists.



"FORGET JUDGE DREDD. THE REAL STAR IS THE MIGHTY ONE HIMSELF"

JUDGE DEATH

With his chilling cry of "the crime is life, the sentence is death!" Judge Death is the antithesis of

ZARJAZ NEW FUTURE WAR STORY!

Judge Dredd, and surely Joe's most formidable archenemy. Journeying to Mega-City One from the alternate dimension of Deadworld, where life itself has been declared illegal, Death meets his match after confronting not just Dredd but also Psi-Judge Anderson. Still, you can't keep a good demonic entity down, and he has returned many times over the intervening years – most notably in the "Necropolis" saga and in "Young Death: Boyhood Of A Superfiend" in *2000 AD*'s sister-title, the *Judge Dredd Megazine*.

ROGUE TROOPER

2000 AD's most enduring future war story, first appearing in Prog 228, masterfully designed and illustrated by Dave Gibbons. Gerry Finley-Day's script focused on the last Genetic Infantryman, who along with his bio-chipped buddies Gunnar, Bagman and Helm traverses the desolate wastes of Nu-Earth, hunting the renegade Traitor General. In 1993 the series was rebooted with Dave Gibbons returning to both write and draw the new run. He elected to create an entirely new GI, Friday, and ditched the bio-chips. It got off to a rough start, but eventually the Friday-based Rogue Trooper found a direction under writer Steve White. His military knowledge made for a more convincing series, and he even managed to connive a way to reconcile the two versions of Rogue. The original Rogue eventually returned, penned by Gordon Rennie, but aside from the odd one-off, the strip has been MIA since 2006.

Above: Rogue Trooper and Judge Death are among the most memorable of all the characters to appear in the whole 40-year life of *2000 AD*.

ROGUE SPIN-OFFS

However, the Rogue Trooper universe lives on in numerous spin-offs. Venus Bluegenes was a Genetic Infantrywoman who battled alongside both Rogue and Friday and earned her own series back in 1988. The 86ers, created by Gordon Rennie, Karl Richardson and PJ Holden, focuses on the 86th Air Support Reconnaissance Squadron, while Jaegir – again created by Rennie, this time with Simon Coleby – is the saga of a Nort inspector hunting down war criminals. Most recently Rennie and Holden created Hunted, which stars the Traitor General. Then there's Mercy Heights. This underrated mid-'90s gem is a sci-fi hospital drama. One of the main characters, pilot Tor Cyan, is revealed to be a former GI.

"WE KNOW 2000 AD IS RUN BY DROIDS, BUT WHAT DO THEY DO ALL DAY?"

SOONER OR LATER

Tapping into previously neglected territory, Peter Milligan, Brendan McCarthy and Tony "Riot" Wright's Sooner or Later breathed new life into *2000 AD*'s back page, starting in Prog 468, capturing the same irreverent spirit as in their indie anthology *Strange Days*. Incorrigible waster Micky Swift is propelled headlong into the 30th century. Encountering lots of "sublime weirdness," he visits a bizarro mirror version of '80s Britain and learns some secrets of the universe from the ever-watchful Fly on the Wall.

LUKE KIRBY

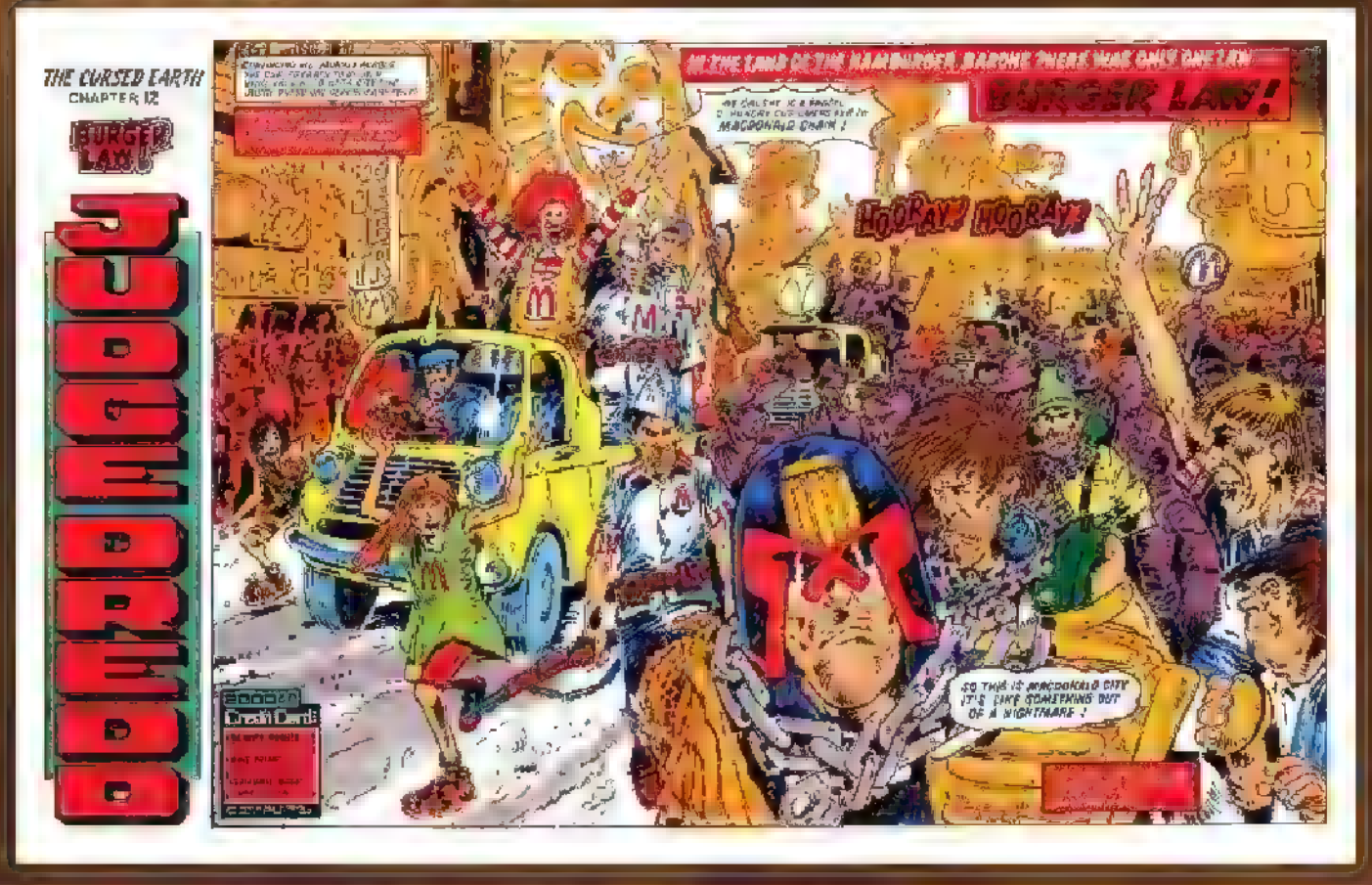
With opening arc "Summer Magic" first gracing the pages of Prog 571 in 1988, *2000 AD*'s resident teenage mage Luke Kirby precedes both Harry Potter and Neil Gaiman's Tim Hunter. Written by former *2000 AD* editor Alan McKenzie and drawn by John Ridgway and Steve Parkhouse, its 1960s milieu recalled a more wistful storytelling age, as it charted the young Luke's journey to becoming a leading alchemist. Unavailable for many years, it will finally be reprinted in May.

JUDGE DREDD MEGA EPICS

Every now and again, the Dredd series will go all out on a sprawling "mega epic". "The Judge Child", "Necropolis", "The Pit"... all of these stories and more have been used to dramatically reshape Dredd's world – usually by killing millions of people. Biggest of these sagas was 2011's "Day of Chaos" – at 48 episodes Judge Dredd's longest and most far-reaching storyline. It pitted Dredd against old adversaries like the Dark Judges and PJ Maybe, and left Mega-City One in tatters, with a much smaller population and a crumbling infrastructure. Formerly a sprawling metropolis, these days it more resembles a post-apocalyptic wasteland. An early classic, meanwhile, was "The Cursed Earth" – a thrilling race against time across the radioactive badlands of the future, which, infamously, saw Dredd cross paths with not only a Jolly Green Giant and nefarious Colonel Sanders, but a deranged Ronald McDonald, incurring the wrath of McD's and ensuring that the offending episodes languished out of print for decades, until last year's *The Cursed Earth: Uncensored*.

Above: Before there was Harry Potter, there was Luke Kirby.

Below: McDonald's and KFC were not over pleased with the "satirical" depiction of their trademarked characters in "The Burger Wars" story arc, and legal action prevented the tale from being reprinted.



DROID LIFE

We all know that *2000 AD* is run by Tharg and his team of droids, not human beings. But what do they do all day? This half-page workplace comedy gives the game away. Daft, funny and always entertaining, it's a treat from Cat Sullivan that's popped up every now and again since Prog 1371.

CABALLISTICS, INC

Gordon Rennie and Dom Reardon struck uncanny gold when they came up with this horror series back in 2003. A team of MOD paranormal investigators taking on supernatural cases is hardly an original premise, but the grim tone and the creators' willingness to throw in shock deaths and characters with divided loyalties – not to mention Reardon's phenomenal monochrome art – meant that this was a cut above. The series last appeared in 2006, but a spinoff, Absalom, continues to this day.

ZOMBO

With lines like "you smell of crime and I'm the deodorant," Zombo's

severed tongue has always been in its decomposing cheek. Based on an idea by artist Henry Flint, it was Al Ewing's first full series after numerous Future Shocks and other one-offs, and he injected some anarchic black humour into it. Increasingly surreal and over-the-top, it reached new heights of brilliant ridiculousness with Prog 1740's "The Day Zombo Died" with undead morris dancers and the Reverse Zombo, Obmoz.

ZENITH

Zenith was Grant Morrison and Steve Yeowell's refreshingly light alternative to the grim grittiness of *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns*. Debuting in 1987's Prog 536, Morrison's irreverent story of a vain pop star turned crimefighter reflected the political and cultural era in which it first appeared. The tale was told over four Phases, with Morrison resurrecting and reinventing several old IPC comics characters in the third Phase – Valiant stalwart Robot Archie going full baggy in Prog 627's Phase III as Acid Archie really took the disco biscuit.

JUDGE HERSHEY

Dredd's closest confidant, always measured, rational and smart. We've followed Hershey all the way from rookie to Chief Judge of Mega-City One. That job probably means she'll eventually meet a sticky end, but until then she's one of the comic's richest characters.

NIKOLAI DANTE

Set in 27th century Imperial Russia, Nikolai Dante is *2000 AD*'s *War and Peace*. Chronicling the changing fortunes of a far-future Romanov dynasty, Robbie Morrison's epic narrative focuses on swashbuckling rogue Nikolai Dante. It debuted in 1997's Prog 1035, and Morrison finally brought Nikolai's grand adventures to a close with "Sympathy for the Devil" in 2012, which saw Nikolai on the verge of marrying the ex-Czar's daughter Jenna Makarov before a final confrontation with an old enemy threatened to scupper his wedding. But that might not be quite the end for Dante, as a special one-off, "Devil May Care", illustrated by original artist Simon Fraser is scheduled for 2017's 40th Birthday issue.

Above: Zombo was dark and weird and totally off the-wall.

Left: Zenith was an upbeat antidote to the grim-and-gritty era of *Watchmen* and *Dark Knight*, but it definitely had its own freaky moments.

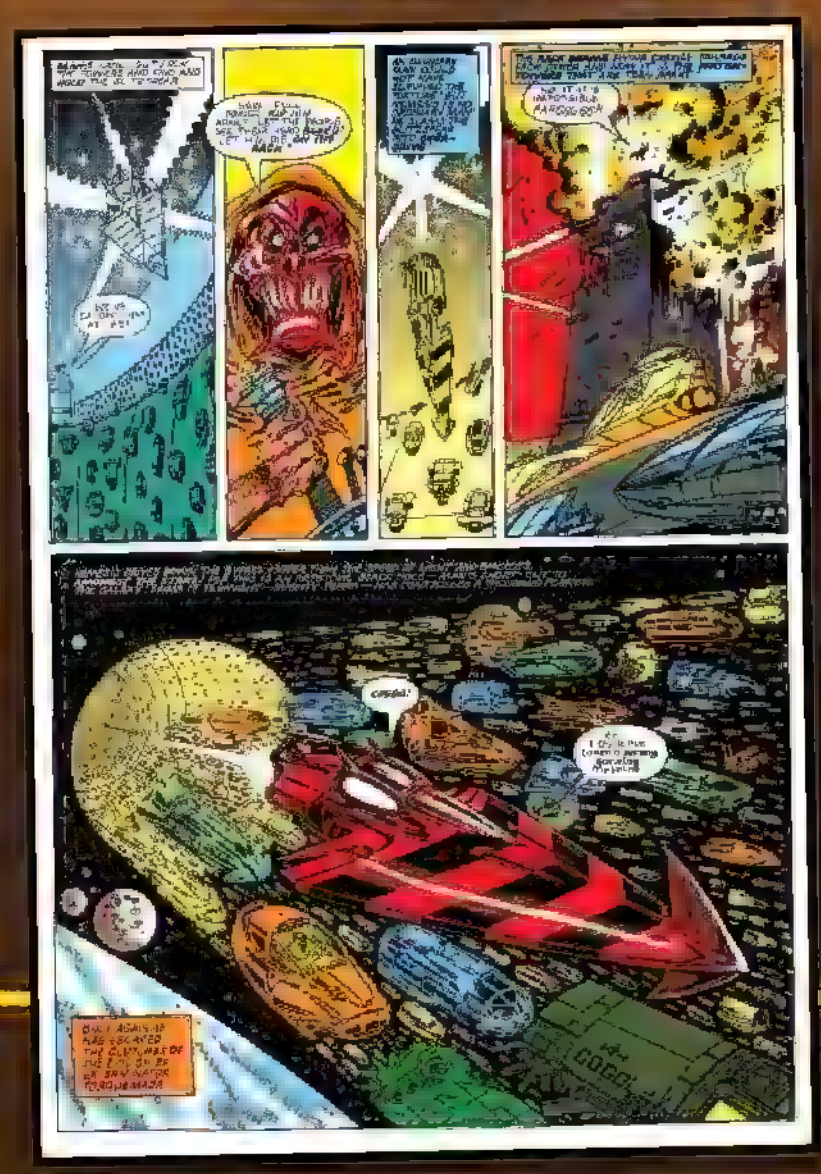
Below: Nemesis the Warlock mixed space opera adventure with an occult twist.

DAVE

Grant Morrison and Mark Millar's subversive strip is either a high or a low point in the comic's history, depending on your taste. Wilfully offensive, it parodies *Daily Mail* types as Thatcherite "hero" Dave bashes his way through the likes of Saddam Hussein and Hitler. It's not for everyone, but there are naughty chuckles to be had here.

NEMESIS THE WARLOCK

Created by Pat Mills and Kevin O'Neill as the first and only instalment of Comic Rock, a series of one-offs inspired by popular songs, Nemesis owes his existence to The Jam's "Going Underground". A follower of Khaos, the demonic Nemesis made for an especially ambiguous hero, killing a bus-full children in one memorable incident – but



HE DIED ALONE
WULF – NO! NO!
ALL MY LIFE WAS BEEN A SERIES OF DEATHS –
A BLOODY JOURNEY ON A PATH OF GORE THAT COULD ONLY EVER LEAD TO ONE DESTINATION –
HE'S –
NOW.
JOHNNY!
NO
NOOOOOOO!
NEXT PROG: DOG ENDS

his enemy, the tyrannical and repressive Torquemada, was even worse. It's one of the most fondly remembered *2000 AD* strips, and especially famous for O'Neill's staggering, detail-packed art.

STRONTIUM DOG

More Wagner and Ezquerra genius, Strontium Dog follows a gang of mutant bounty hunters on their various misadventures. While there is a shifting cast of characters, the most prominent Dogs are the psychic Johnny Alpha, Wulf Sternhammer and "Middenface" McNulty. One especially entertaining story saw Alpha travel back in time to 1945 to apprehend Hitler and bring him to trial in the 22nd century. On the other hand the series could also be deadly serious. There were precious few laughs in the 21-part "Max Bubba". A mutant criminal whose earlier scheme to kill off humanity's Viking ancestors was thwarted, Bubba returns in Prog 445, gunning down Wulf in a hail of bullets.

JOHNNY ALPHA DIES!

If Wulf's demise wasn't enough, Johnny Alpha himself bit the dust four years later in "The Final Solution". But while Wulf's death had been heroic, Johnny's murder at the hands of an anti-mutant activist proved controversial as longtime Strontium Dog artist Carlos Ezquerra declined to draw it, meaning that first Simon Harrison and then Colin MacNeil had to be drafted in to illustrate Alan Grant's script.

Above: *2000 AD* was never a "nursery comic" aimed at younger children, but some character deaths were shocking by any measure.

JUDGE ANDERSON

Cassandra Anderson is a far more nuanced character than her colleague and sort-of-friend/mentor, Dredd. She's a Psi-Judge, and her stories often lean towards the supernatural: she has faced and defeated – the likes of Judge Death. But, more than that, her compassionate nature has made her a far more sympathetic hero than Dredd. She understands fear and loneliness in a way that Joe

"THE DEMONIC NEMESIS IS AN AMBIGUOUS HERO, KILLING CHILDREN"

FUTUREQUAKE

First started by now regular *2000 AD* scribe Arthur Wyatt in 2003 as a vehicle for publishing his Future Shock proposals, *FutureQuake* has since grown to encompass horror annual *Something Wicked*, the Strontium Dog centred *Dogbreath*, and *Zarjaz*, which draws on all of *2000 AD*'s rich, 40-year history. With the likes of Al Ewing, Charlie Adlard, Michael Carroll, Cullen Bunn and Will Sliney having contributed to past issues, it has been an ideal springboard for creators who later go on to work for *2000 AD* itself, as well as providing opportunities for already-established writers and artists.

"I'm very proud that almost all issues of *Zarjaz* have had covers by real, working artists such as Colin MacNeil, who did a VCs cover for *Zarjaz* #5 through to Neil Roberts' stunning Dredd and Hershey for the latest issue, #27," says Dave Evans, who currently runs FutureQuake Press with Richmond Clements. "As for current creators, there isn't really a steady stable, as creators come and go as they progress through their career. But we're fortunate that many creators will return with stories that they feel are suitable for us, such as the recent writing by Jim Alexander for *Zarjaz*."

With Evans claiming that "*Zarjaz* and *Dogbreath* only exist because we play nice," *FutureQuake* has a surprisingly cordial relationship with *2000 AD* publishers Rebellion. "Can you imagine Marvel or DC not only allowing fans to publish Batman or Spider-Man comics, but to sometimes even plug them in their editorials?" he asks. "They could close both titles with an email, so it's a testament to the character of Tharg and all at the command module that they allow us to play with their toys. We are not-for-profit, and so we do the best we can with the limited resources available to us. *2000 AD* also get a copy of all of the work we produce, and we have had compliments from many of Tharg's minions."

While *2000 AD* will commemorate its 40th anniversary with a special birthday issue, *FutureQuake* also have special plans for *Zarjaz* in 2017. "Alongside Judge Dredd, there will be strips featuring ABC Warriors, Fiends of the Eastern Front, MACH One, Devlin Waugh and Torquemada," Evans teases. "Remember it's not called *Zarjaz* for nothing."

simply can't. That said, she's still a dab hand with a Lawgiver.

FUTURE SHOCKS AND TIME TWISTERS

Some of *2000 AD*'s most memorable moments come not from the sprawling mega-epics, but from these one-off short stories with a sting in the tail. Alan Moore, Peter Milligan, Grant Morrison, Neil Gaiman and many more comics legends have all written for the strand, and stories like Moore's "The Reversible Man", which neatly details the life of its main protagonist backwards from his death to his eventual birth, are hidden Brit comics gems.

SINISTER DEXTER

Finnigan Sinister and Ramone Dexter debuted in the 1995 Winter Special and instantly became firm fan favourites. Author Dan Abnett was influenced by films like *Pulp Fiction* and *Reservoir Dogs*, and Sinister and Dexter's distinctive language was as infectious as Tarantino's snappy dialogue. As drawn by *Mad Max: Fury Road*'s Mark Sexton, Prog 2000's "Replica" aptly sets the scene for many more adventures.

SCARLET TRACES

Ian Edginton and D'Israeli's fantastic steampunk sequel to *The War Of The Worlds* began as a web comic before the *Megazine*, then *2000 AD* picked it up. Working from the premise that humanity has been able to reverse-engineer Martian tech following the failed invasion, the relentlessly inventive strip has shades of *The League Of Extraordinary Gentlemen*. Read our review of Volume 1 on p116.

Above: *2000 AD* was never a "nursery comic" aimed at younger children... Or have we mentioned that already?

AZE INTO THE FIST DREDD!"

"Judge Death Lives" (Progs 224-228) quadrupled the deadly menace posed by the escaped Dark Judge, as he is joined by Judges Fire, Mortis and Fear. John Wagner, Alan Grant and Brian Bolland's story also sees the return of Judge Anderson. But forget all that – it's worthwhile mainly for boasting *2000 AD*'s best ever line, as Dredd smashes through Judge Fear's face.

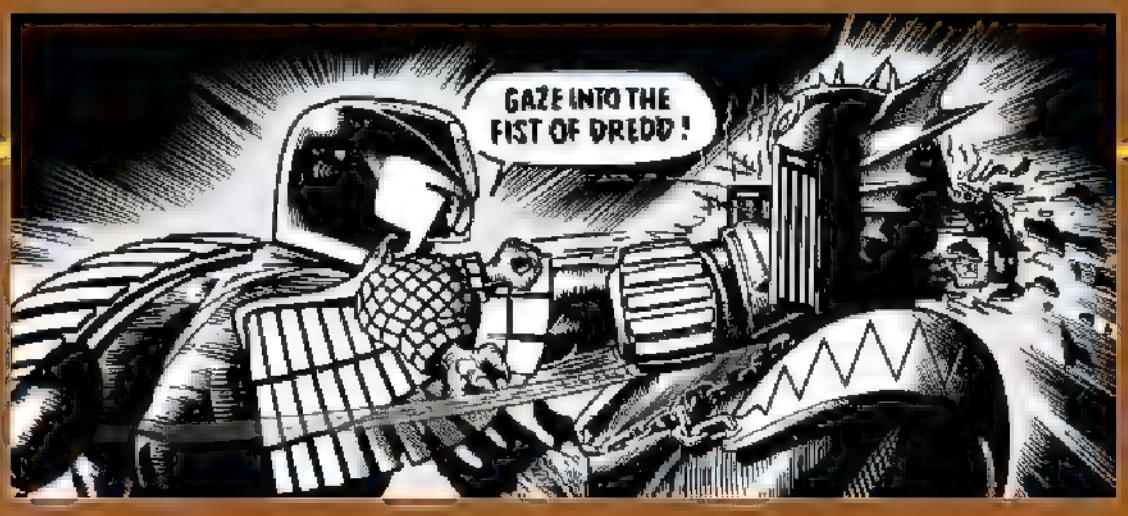
ICKLEBACK

A self-style "Pope of Crime", Stickleback resembles a sinister hybrid of Moriarty and Fagin. The tale, set in a Gormenghast-esque, steampunk Victorian London, takes place in the same universe as several of writer Ian Edginton's other *2000 AD* series including The Red Seas and Leviathan, his previous collaboration with artist D'Israeli. The tale riffs off the work of classic crime authors like Arthur Conan Doyle, and it was suggested in Prog 2011 that Stickleback is none other than the Great Detective himself...

DEVLIN WAUGH

2000 AD's first openly gay character, Devlin is a smooth talking exorcist. In contrast to the often surly heroes in the strips around him, Waugh is witty and urbane and has a love of flower arranging. He's also a hard-as-nails vampire following a dust-up in the fanger-infested prison Aquatraz. That's not stopped him from being on the side of the angels, however, and he remains one of the most entertaining supporting characters.

"SOME OF 2000 AD'S MOST MEMORABLE MOMENTS ARE IN ONE-OFF STORIES"



TRIFECTA

While individual characters had crossed over with each other, "Trifecta" broke new ground for *2000 AD* as the plotlines of the then-current series of The Simping Detective and Low Life unexpectedly dovetailed with the main Judge Dredd strip. It was a jaw-dropping moment, culminating in a 28-page story that encompassed all of Prog 1812.

HALO JONES

One of Alan Moore's most celebrated comics, if not as widely known as *Watchmen* or *V For Vendetta*. If 1983's first arc didn't quite get its balance of experimentation and action quite right, Moore and Ian Gibson really hit their stride with Book Two. Escaping the claustrophobic confines of The Hoop, 50th century heroine Halo lands a job as a stewardess on an interstellar starliner. After her formerly loyal robot dog Toby turns on her, she is saved by the gender-shifting Glyth.

HEWLIGAN'S HAIRCUT

A real one-off, this absurdist comedy follows Hewligan, who gets a daft new barnet, which has the side-effect of bending reality. Created by Peter Milligan and Jamie Hewlett, it's laugh-out-loud funny, utterly absurd and, despite running to only eight episodes, remains one of *2000 AD*'s most fondly remembered tales.

THE DEAD MAN

Written by John Wagner under a pseudonym, this tale of a disfigured judge who takes the Long Walk into the Cursed Earth was initially a diverting read, thanks mostly to John Ridgway's art, but no classic. The revelation that the Dead Man is actually Dredd, though, is one of *2000 AD*'s most significant story twists.

ZAUCER OF ZILK

Al Ewing and Brendan McCarthy's psychedelic quest is both deeply weird and yet surprisingly straightforward. The story of a wizard on a quest to defeat an evil enemy, it's a traditional narrative, but told in explosive style with McCarthy's brain-melting visuals.

ACE TRUCKING CO

Ageing fans tend to get a bit misty-eyed about Ace Trucking Co., and with good reason. One of *2000 AD*'s warmest, funniest series, the saga of space-trucker Ace, skipper on the Speedo Ghost, was a huge hit with readers – sometimes to the annoyance of creators John Wagner, Alan Grant and Massimo Belardinelli, who made abortive attempts to end the series. It did finally finish in 1988, until a one-off story in last year's Sci-Fi Special by Eddie Robson.

BAD COMPANY

Bad Company is *2000 AD*'s finest future war tale. We follow Danny Franks, a young soldier battling the alien Krool, and witness his transformation from newbie to hardened warrior. Peter Milligan's scripts were a brutal look at the horrors of war, while the late Brett Ewins rendered the strip with beautiful insanity. The main series wrapped up in 1988, but Milligan has returned to it intermittently, most recently with "First Casualties", drawn by Rufus Dayglo and Jim McCarthy as a tribute to Ewins.

Above left: When Judge Death hisses "Gaze into the face of death", Judge Dredd's rejoinder is pretty much unforgettable.

Below: The stylish, futuristic Halo Jones proved a long term fan favourite.

TELGEUSIAN SLANG

2000 AD has its own language, baffling to newbies, a running source of amusement for fans. "Borag Thungg" is Thargs traditional greeting to readers (or "Earthlets") each issue. "Florix Grabundae" is a way of saying thank you, possibly to a "Deca Thargo" – a reader who has read *2000 AD* since Prog 1. If an issue is especially stuffed with "thrill-power" then it's "Scrotnig" – but if something is *really* good, then it's "zarjaz!" The list really does go on. For now, however, "Splundig vur Thrigg!" CH

Supergirl Soars

Supergirl has had mixed fortunes in the past, but the writer of her new Rebirth series, Steve Orlando, tells **David Barnett** he's confident he's got to the core of the character...

For a super-powered survivor of the planet Krypton, Supergirl sure has been badly treated in the nearly six decades since she was introduced. Killed off twice, revamped and rebooted within an inch of her meta-human life as editorial policy decided she wasn't Kryptonian after all, then oh yes she was, then no she wasn't again... It feels like nobody's really ever known what to do with her.

Thank Rao, then, for Steve Orlando. The New York based writer is in the midst of Rebirthing the entire Justice League line for DC, but he has a special place in his heart for Kara Zor-El, who debuted in her own Rebirth title in the second half of 2016. Finally we're getting the Supergirl we deserve.

But before we hear from Steve, just who is this red-white-and-blue streak across the sky?

Super beginnings

Funnily enough, when Supergirl was first introduced in the DC Universe, way back in *Superman* #123 (August 1958), she wasn't Superman's cousin at all. In fact, she was an actual male wish fulfilment figure... that of Superman's pal Jimmy Olsen.

Finding himself in possession of a magic totem (this sort of thing happened a lot in the 1950s), Jimmy decides that the best way to use his wish is to conjure up a companion for his mate Supes... and creates Super-Girl (note the hyphenated name). Superman, it has to be said, is a little curmudgeonly at the sudden presence of this female version of him until Super-Girl makes the ultimate sacrifice to save the big fella from a Kryptonite meteorite lobbed at him by some villains. The dying Super-Girl begs Jimmy to use his magic totem to un-create her, which he duly does. And Super-Girl, in the same issue she had been introduced, suffered her first death and was no more.

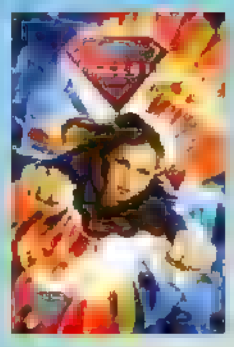
However, the response to the character was so positive that DC decided the following year to re-introduce Supergirl – minus the hyphen – in the form we've come to know and love: Superman's cousin Kara Zor-El. She appeared in *Action Comics* #252, written by Otto Binder with art by Al Plastino.

Opposite: Emanuela Lupacchino's self-confident version of Supergirl in the initial Rebirth one-shot.

Above: The ongoing *Supergirl* Rebirth series interweaves Kara's day-to-day life with her super-adventures. It worked for *Smallville*!

Binder had form for creating female complements to existing superheroes – as the writer of the Fawcett character Captain Marvel (who himself was later folded into the DC Universe and appeared in a series titled, for legal reasons, by his magic word *Shazam!*), Binder created Mary Marvel, as part of the growing Marvel Family.

Binder and Plastino also set to work widening the Superman mythos, introducing not just Supergirl but also the Legion of Superheroes, Brainiac and the Bottled City of Kandor. But it was with Supergirl that they created one of DC's best loved characters, and suddenly Superman wasn't the Last Kryptonian any more. Baby Kal-El escaped the destruction of Krypton when his parents sent him to Earth to be discovered by the kind-hearted Kents in Kansas. Kara's home Argo City had also survived thanks to the work of Kal's uncle – Kara's father, Zor-El. The scientist had covered Argo City with a tough transparent dome which allowed this chunk of the destroyed planet to float in space, inexorably towards our solar system. >



Left: Brian Ching's cover for issue 3 has a very on trend, manga influenced look.

Below: There's still plenty of room for other interpretations – like this variant cover by fan favourite artist Adam Hughes.

Like his brother Jor El, Zor El was fiercely protective of his offspring, and when devastation threatened Argo City in turn he packed the teenage Kara off in a rocket to Earth, hoping she'd be found by Superman. To ensure that he recognised his cousin (although the leaping tall buildings in a single bound might have been a bit of a giveaway), Zor El dressed her in an outfit reminiscent of Superman's, whose fame on Earth was already spreading throughout the universe.

By the wreckage of Kara's rocket, a chin stroking Superman wonders how the slight, blonde girl in front of him can have survived, and why she's wearing his duds.

"Baffled, Superman?" Kara says. "Let me tell you my story as my parents told it to me! When Krypton blew up, you were not the only one to escape alive..."

And there is the key to how Supergirl is the same as her cousin but also very different, according to Steve Orlando. "Kara came from the somewhere like Superman did, but where he had no choice in the matter – he was sent as a baby to escape his planet's destruction – she left behind what she knew to come to Earth. She was emigrating to a new place, and had to get used to a new culture, new people, at the same time as leaving everyone she knows behind. If you take out the fantastical elements of her story, I think that's something many of us can relate to, whether we're emigrating ourselves to a new country or just starting a new job or entering a new social circle."

Finding a place in the world

And maybe, through that, we can begin to realise that Supergirl is perhaps the hero we need right now. At a time when countries and states are looking inwards and the outsider is feared and vilified, here's the ultimate immigrant having to come to terms with a new home.

As Orlando says, Kara was older and knew what she was leaving behind, and had to come to terms with being in a place where she was alien. It's how she copes with this that is at the heart of Orlando's run on the new *Supergirl* title. "What interests me hugely is not just Kara's physical power – yes, she can pick up a tank and throw it at the moon, if she wants to – but her capacity for caring. And that's true of all the Super characters. Kara wants to be good, and to see the good in other people. That doesn't mean she's stupid or naive, but that her capacity for caring is one of her greatest assets. She can make mistakes like anyone – she's a teenager – but she wants to learn from them, and to help other people not make mistakes or learn from their mistakes as well."

Over the years, Supergirl has been through many iterations and situations. She originally adopted the secret identity of Linda Lee Danvers, and various directions she's been taken in have seen her as a schoolgirl, a college student, a news reporter (following in Clark's footsteps), even a daytime TV soap actress. During the fad for giving superheroes animal sidekicks she ended up cleaning the litter tray of Streaky the Supercat and even kicked around for a spell with Comet the Superhorse, probably one of the least well thought out minor characters ever. (He was a former centaur. Best not to ask.)

She hopped around from book to book, did her time with the Legion of Superheroes in the far future, had her own title intermittently. How did Orlando first encounter her?

"Not actually in the comics, but in the Superman animated series. That was a good portrayal of her. She had a lot of the verve and joy for life that is key to the character." Orlando pauses. "Probably the first time I read her was in *Crisis*, but nobody's best introduction to a character is a story where they die."

Ah, yes, *Crisis On Infinite Earths*. Running from 1985 to 1986, this seminal cross over series was one of the first, biggest and best attempts by DC to rationalise its tangled continuities, its multiple Earths, its conflicting storylines and characters. It was also notable for Supergirl making the ultimate sacrifice... just as she had almost 30 years earlier. Only this time she wasn't just saving the life of Superman, she was preventing the destruction of the entire multiverse.

Not just a thrilling story, *Crisis* was a pragmatic way to streamline the DC Universe. The then editorial team wanted Superman to be back in his position as the Last Son of Krypton, so when the dust settled and the red skies faded after *Crisis*, Kara was out of the picture. Nobody even remembered that there ever had been a Supergirl.

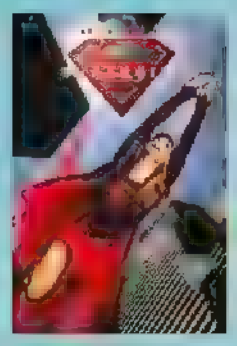
Comebacks and continuity

But you can't keep a good Kryptonian down. Continuity smoothing crossovers are the norm rather than the exception these days, and Supergirl has popped up in one form or another in most of them. She sort of came back as Matrix, post *Crisis*, but not as a Kryptonian. Then in Peter David's 1996 run of her title she becomes a kind of "Earth born Angel", complete with fiery wings. A Supergirl appears in 2003, claiming to be the daughter of Clark and Lois from the future, but it all turns out to be a Brainiac plot.

The short lived New 52 reboot brought Kara back as a Kryptonian, crashing to Earth but this time with full amnesia, and she ends up becoming a weapon of the Red Lanterns. It's fair to say, throughout all this, Kara never really got the respect she deserves.

So how is Steve Orlando rationalising all this tangled back story for his Rebirth take? Is it time to throw all the bad stuff out with the bathwater and start again?

"I try not to just jettison everything," he says. "The thing with Rebirth is getting to the core of the character, so people can come to Supergirl either fresh and find out for themselves what she's like, or come back to her and remind themselves why she's so great."



Above: Kara returns to Argo City only to encounter the Cyborg Superman. Variant cover by Bengal

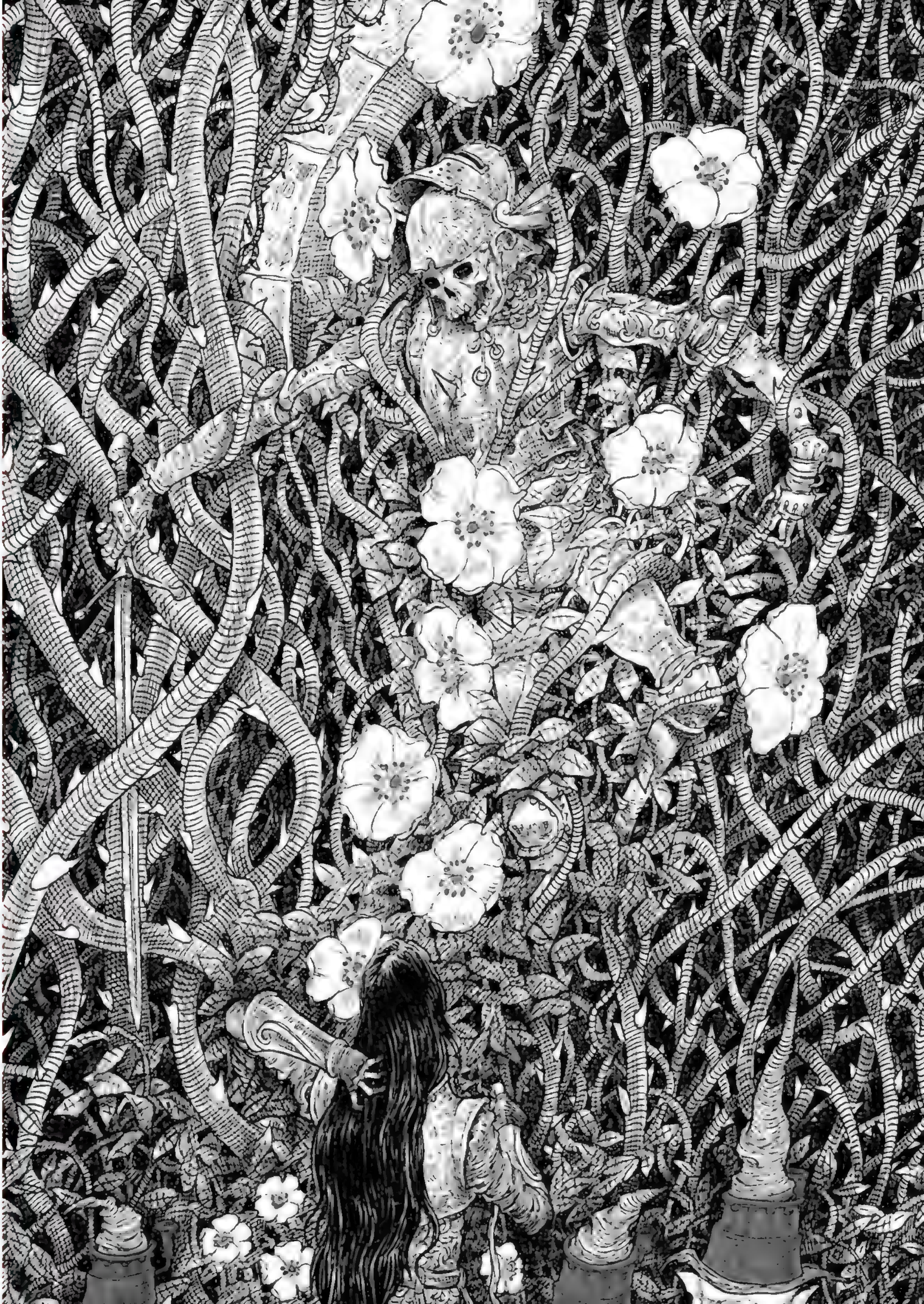
Rebirth Kara is a teen again, navigating her way through school and the new life she's having to forge for herself, while at the same time coming to terms with the fact that she's one of the most powerful people on the planet.

"Should Kara be a role model for young girls? I suppose she certainly could be, especially in the way that she meets adversity," Orlando says. "She's a positive character. That doesn't mean she thinks the world is all good – she's not that naive but she knows she has the power to try to make it a better place."

With Orlando Rebirthing the Justice League and writing a slew of one shots featuring the squad members in early 2017, might we see Supergirl joining the team? He's playing his cards close to his chest.

"We might see her in a team book," he says. "Whether it's the JLA, I don't know. She's a teen, and there are a couple of teen teams in the DC Universe, remember..."

"What interests me is not just Kara's physical power but her capacity for caring, seeing the good in people"



The art of CHRIS RIDDELL

THE AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR AND POLITICAL CARTOONIST TALKS TO **STEPHEN KELLY**

That Chris Riddell is Britain's Children's Laureate, that his work has captured the childhood imagination, is no surprise: his art is a world unto itself, a lavishly bright and beautiful place rich in magic and detail – a place that any child would want to live in forever. That he also uses the same style – fairytale animals and all – for a weekly political cartoon in *The Observer* newspaper is possibly a bit more unusual.

"I wouldn't say there's a difference between them," Riddell says. "If doing a simple book for under threes you use bright primary colours and colourful animals doing amusing things. And when you're working for *The Observer*, you will draw nice, colourful things and use animals for amusing effect. It's about how you communicate visually. I think cartoons are amongst the most powerful literary tools we have."

In the wake of Donald Trump's presidential victory, *Comic Heroes* sat down with Chris Riddell to talk political art, children's art, Neil Gaiman and why Alastair Campbell thinks he's "obscene"...

COMIC HEROES: Let's start by talking about your style. What's the process there?

CHRIS RIDDELL: Well, I start with pencil. My pencil work tends to be quite deliberate. I'm more calligraphic and sculptural. That's why artists like William Heath Robinson appeal to me, because they're linear. It's about how they build up texture through the marks they make. That's how I'd describe my form. And then the finish comes in when I sit down and ink in the lines. I think this is a fairly comic strip approach. Once that is done I'll rub out the pencil and then I will apply washes of colour over the top of that in watercolour and inks.

CH: Judging by your Goth Girl piece [see page 78], you're also a fan of stripping back your art too?

CR: That Goth Girl piece is unfinished. It's one part of this landscape environment that has had no work done to it, so it's a huge jungle of foliage. I enjoy doing that because sometimes you want that sense of an illustration having taken you a very long time. You want the viewer to turn the page and go "Ohh". And also, in terms of its style, I think black and white can be incredibly rich. It's often seen as paring down but equally if you use texture and line and build up a picture in that way, nothing will invoke such a sumptuous feel as black and white.

Opposite: The prolific Riddell is most widely known as author/artist of numerous children's books, and collaborated with Paul Stewart on the *Edge Chronicles* and *Muddle Earth* series. He illustrated Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, *The Graveyard Book* and more recently *The Sleeper and the Spindle*. This is one of his illustrations for that reimagining of many fairytale motifs

CH: Your use of colour is striking as well. We can see that in your piece illustrating The Hunting of the Snark [page 76]...

CR: That's done in sepia ink, and with watercolour washes over the top. [The subject] is a wonderful 19th century comic verse by Lewis Carroll, which isn't quite as well known as some of his other pieces. It was nice to have a go at that because it's been illustrated a few times but not as many as Alice [in Wonderland], so I felt I could come to it with my own take. Watercolour can be used in a soft, diffuse way. I would love to play around with digital technology that can mirror that. But in producing actual artwork you have to make decisions. In many ways it's good as it trains you to be definitive in the decisions you make, which

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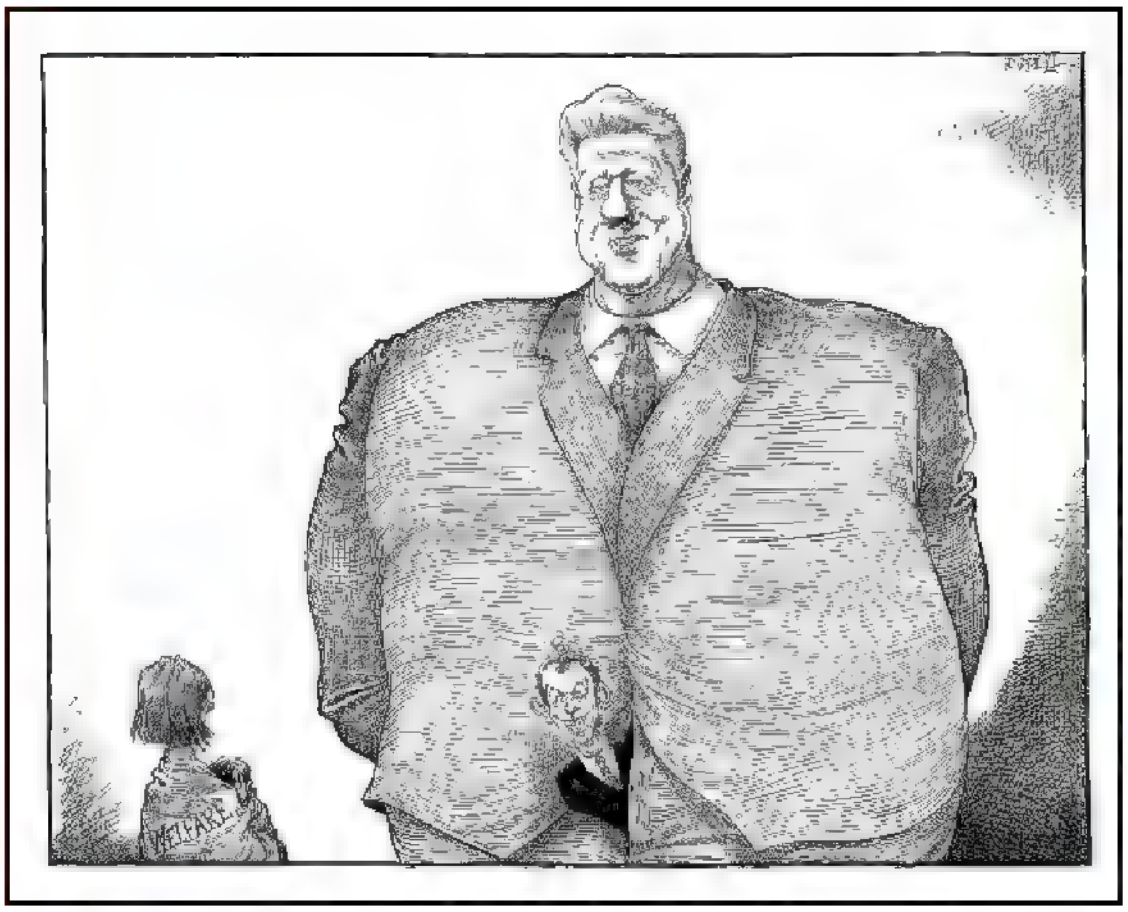
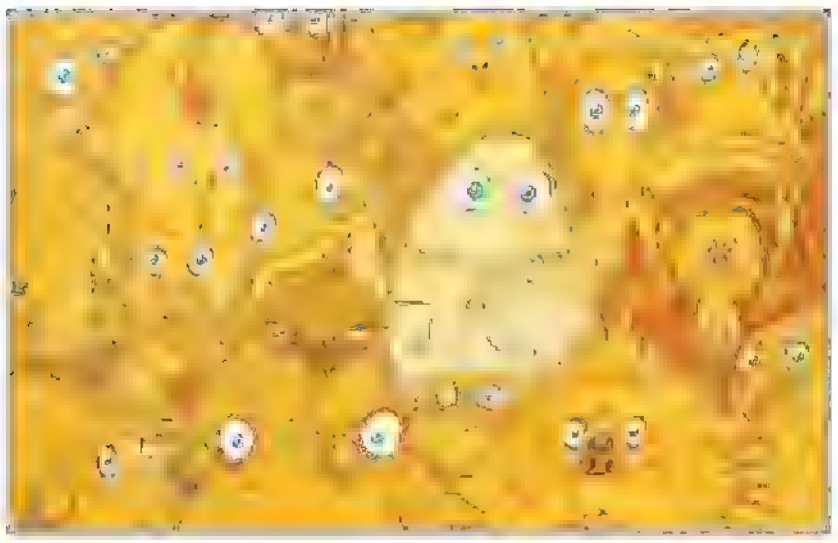




Left: He may be the UK's Children's Laureate but Riddell's political cartoons certainly don't pull their punches

Above: One of Riddell's illustrations for The Hunting of the Snark

Opposite: Another striking image from *The Sleeper and the Spindle* subverting expectations of the fairytale

I think is maybe a dying art. We live in a digital world where everything can be provisional until the last moment.

CH: A lot of your work involves collaborating with writers such as Neil Gaiman. How do you find that process?

CR: It's one of my absolutely favourite things about being an illustrator. The exciting thing is to be given a text and then be invited to respond to it in one's own personal way. That's what I love about working with Neil. Neil is never prescriptive. He enables his illustrators. I'm one of many illustrators who work with Neil and we all love working with him because he actually engineers illustrative space into his stories that you feel free to explore and expand upon. He's nuanced, he's never didactic. Sometimes he's ambivalent on purpose. He allows you to make decisions on a character or setting.

CH: How have you found the role of Children's Laureate?

CR: There are two answers to that. One is truthful and the other is sort of received wisdom. Obviously the received wisdom is that it's absolutely crazily busy, I'm absolutely exhausted, I have no time to do any work, it's taken over my life. I've been working incredibly hard doing it. That's the official answer. And the real answer is that it's absolutely tremendous. It's been energising in all sorts of ways. It's sparked all sorts of creative ideas. And I've absolutely loved it. It's been a real privilege. I hesitate to go on too much about that because I'm worried that I ought to be making harder work of it.

CH: I imagine the position has given you a valuable platform?

CR: I don't overestimate that platform but it is certainly a platform to talk about things I care about. For instance, the school library provisions in our schools: the way in which this extraordinary resource we have is taken as a given, but there's no actual requirement for a school to provide a library, and what sort of library they provide is entirely up to the individual institutions. I think it's incredibly important for all of us who work in children's books that the next generation is influenced by good books and the love of reading... In an age of austerity it's not a luxury. Don't put it under luxuries. Put it on the list of "we need this for the future".

> "I THINK POLITICAL CARTOONS ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN THEY'VE EVER BEEN"

CH: Let's talk about your political cartoons. Do you have a favourite?

CR: I do have a favourite. It goes back to 1997. I did a cartoon of Tony Blair popping out of the zip of Bill Clinton's trousers. What I was doing was playing on the idea that at the time Clinton was going through one of his sex scandals where he might have been forced to go into court and testify about intimate parts of his anatomy. And he had come over to bask in Tony Blair's election victory, the victory of New Labour. So: Bill with his local difficulties, Tony being celebratory. I thought the two came together nicely.

But this made [Labour spin doctor] Alastair Campbell deeply angry, and he phoned up my editor and said, "This is outrageous! This is obscene! To have this on the pages of a Sunday newspaper?!" So my editor called me into his office and said, "I've just had this complaint by Alastair Campbell about the cartoon you did last week, and I just want to buy you a pint." He thought that *The Observer* had been far too supportive of New Labour and it was about time they started getting at them. It was a lovely >

moment. You do want to irritate people sometimes with cartoons.

CH: What would you say is the role of political cartoons in the age of Donald Trump?

CR: I think they're more important than they've ever been, possibly as important as when they first began as a genre in the 18th century. Political cartoons began as prints in print shops, and you could go to your local shop and instead of buying a piece of art that would cost you your month's salary, you could buy a print of what was going on. That's how a lot of people got wind of the latest scandal or got to know political personalities, through the populations of these easy to acquire prints.

We now live in an age not too dissimilar to that 18th century culture, where instead of the print shop we have the internet, and social media is our print shop. And one can post things there which are eye catching and grab the imagination like an 18th century print did its audience. You're still using exactly the same techniques but you're reaching an enormous audience that way, and their response is very similar. People want to see the mighty ridiculed for a point. When someone is already ridiculous, sometimes as a satirist all you have to do is hold up a mirror and allow their own image to shine back at them. Donald Trump tweeting in the middle of the night? You just need to draw Donald Trump tweeting and it's as ludicrous as any comment might be. That's why I think it's so relevant, because we live in an age where manipulation of image and message is all around us. And we need to comment on that.

CH: The American election saw some very telling political cartoons. Yet for a lot of liberals, especially those in entertainment, I get the sense the American election was a humbling experience, with their anti-Trump message dominating the mainstream yet doing nothing. Do you feel the same way?

CR: I don't subscribe to that view at all. I don't think that, as a political cartoonist, my job is to change the world. My principal job is to have an opinion, and have an opinion that I express in visual terms. What happens to that afterwards is not down to me, and I always think with free speech anyone can have any opinion on what I do and that's fine. They can tell me to my face. I don't start out with that idea of "Oh no, I can't change the world". Of course I can't. But that doesn't mean one can't engage and put art out there. And I think increasingly when we have access to thousands of different images, the art of capturing a thought in a humorous, visual way has never been more potent.

CH: I imagine drawing Donald Trump is something you've had to get used to. How have you found it?

CR: I find it a constant joy and it makes me despair. It's the oddest feeling in the world: that such a comedic figure has reached the dizzying heights that he has, and the huge potential for a satirist that this man provides. It's a peculiar feeling. It's like being given a gentle massage while someone punches you.

Above: Riddell is scathing about US President elect Trump, whom he sometimes refers to as "the Oompa Loompa of Doom"

Opposite: Goth Girl stars in a series of deliciously dark children's books written and drawn by Riddell. Her father Lord Goth believes that children should be heard and not seen, and hence she usually has to wear large clumpy boots so that he can always hear her coming

CH: A lot of comedians have said Trump is actually harder to satirise, because the man is essentially a walking satire of himself. Do you agree with that?

CR: I don't believe that. If you look at the way one of our greatest political cartoonists, David Low, drew Hitler, it is absurd, ridiculous, he's a funny little figure. What Low does brilliantly is observe that bombastic body language and the trumped up quality of this little figure, and yet we know this man to be a monster. He did the same with Stalin. He drew these two monstrous figures.

When I draw someone like Vladimir Putin or Donald Trump, I think of David Low often. Because these people, in their own way, are our contemporary monsters. They have all these comedic qualities to them and they have the deeply chilling aspect of their world views, and I think that's what we're dealing with. There are tools cartoonists can use, and I think the greatest tool a satirist has is a mirror to hold up a mirror to these people and say "right, this is what you look like and it's ridiculous." CH

DESTROY ALL MONSTERS!

WRITER CULLEN BUNN TELLS **STEPHEN JEWELL** HIS PLANS TO UNLEASH MONSTERS IN THE MARVEL UNIVERSE

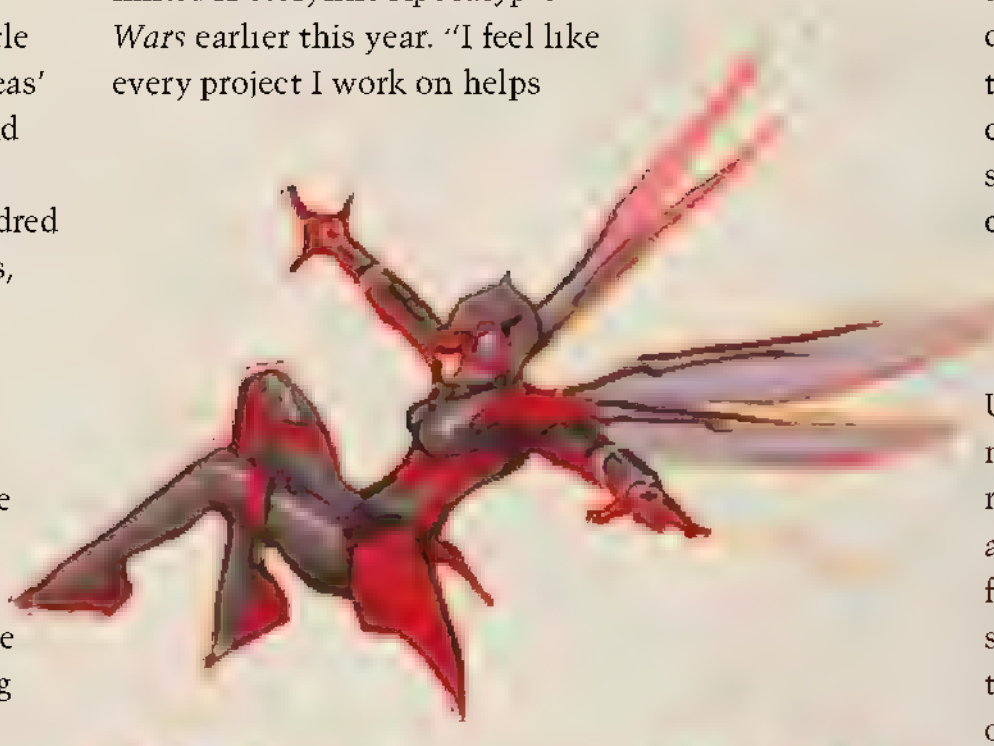
Growing up, Cullen Bunn was a dedicated fan of giant monsters. Now the St. Louis based scribe is taking charge of what is perhaps Marvel's biggest crossover yet, at least in terms of the sheer size of the antagonists... Beginning this month, *Monsters Unleashed* will see all of Marvel's heavy hitters, from the Avengers and the X Men to the Inhumans, Deadpool and beyond, coming together to battle a whole host of the House of Ideas' most bombastic behemoths. And while the five issue mini series promises nothing but "one hundred per cent chaotic fun" for readers, for its author it's a childhood dream come true.

MONSTER MAKER

"For anyone who knows me, the appeal of this project is easy to see," says Bunn. "One of my earliest memories of the creative process was writing and drawing a book called 'Attack of the Monsters,' which featured King Kong, Godzilla and Mothra. I remember little about it now, but I do recall that Godzilla was defeated when the forces of humanity flew over him in a helicopter and dropped a sword on his head. If you look around my office, you'll see plenty of giant monster toys, such as Godzilla, Krusher, Shogun Warriors and others, so I've been preparing for this project for a long, long time."

Currently resident writer on *Uncanny X Men* and IDW's Micronauts revival, Bunn has plenty of recent experience coordinating event books, having co written IDW's just finished Hasbro crossover *Revolution* and taken part in the thematically linked X storyline *Apocalypse Wars* earlier this year. "I feel like every project I work on helps prepare me for the next," he reasons. "So while I haven't necessarily worked on a book with this kind of scope and scale before, there are lessons I've learned from every other book that I can use while working on this."

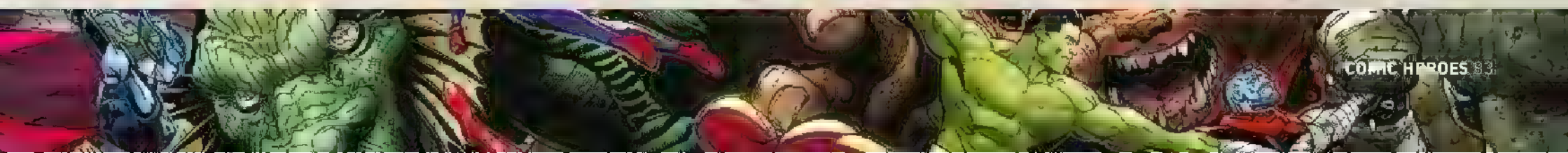
Above and opposite: All of Marvel's leading characters will face off against an onslaught of monsters in a five issue mini series and a number of spin offs



"A WORLD-SPANNING STORY, INTRODUCING MAJOR NEW HEROES AND VILLAINS"

However, *Monsters Unleashed* takes place over a considerably wider canvas with a significantly larger cast. "This is a world spanning story, and there are dozens and dozens of characters to manage," Bunn explains. "The challenge is to make sure that the story is clear while giving all these characters some panel time. In addition, we're introducing some major new heroes and villains to the Marvel Universe in this tale, so we must make sure that they resonate with readers. And to top it off, this isn't a story where anyone is sitting still for very long. The action is frenetic, so everything is happening while the characters – new and old – are on the move."

While Monsters Unleashed has been described as "Marvel's version of *Pacific Rim*," Bunn cites classic films like *Destroy All Monsters* and "even *Godzilla: Final Wars*" as crucial influences. "There's also a bit of Gamera, Gorgo, Ultraman and Johnny Socko and his Flying Robot in the mix as well," he says. >



MONSTERS ROLL CALL

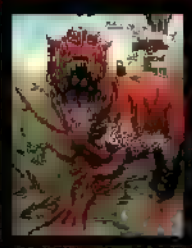
FIN FANG FOOM

Possibly the most ubiquitous of Monsters Unleashed's gruesome baddies, Fin Fang Foom was created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, and first appeared in *Strange Tales* #89. Boasting dragon-like appearance and abilities, the extraterrestrial villain initially locked horns with it, The Living Colossus. He was integrated into Marvel continuity in the 1970s and has since regularly come up against the likes of Thor, Iron Man and Next Wave, and after rehabilitation even headed up his own team, the Fin Fang Four.

GOOM AND GOOGAM

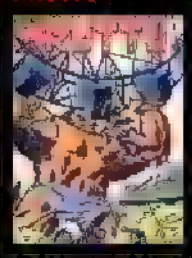
Dubbed "The Thing from Planet X," literally bigheaded alien Goom actually predates Fin Fang Foom, having made his bow in March 1961's *Tales of Suspense* #15. Also the handiwork of Lee and Kirby, with inker Dick Ayers, Goom – and his son Googam – boast increased mental powers, and after making themselves at home on Monster Isle, also joined the ranks of the Fin Fang Four.

DEVIL DINOSAUR



Created by Jack Kirby in 1978 as Marvel's answer to DC's Kamandi, the scarlet-skinned T-Rex and his ape-like buddy Moon Boy are originally inhabitants of Dinosaur World, a parallel land where the giant reptiles and humans live side by side. Most recently, he teamed up with Moon Girl, alias nine-year-old Lunella Lafayette.

BRUTTU

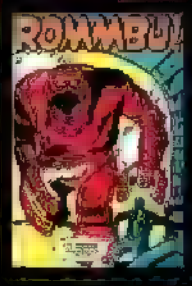


Making his bow in *Tales of Suspense* #22 in October 1961, Bruttu is yet another Lee/Kirby/Ayers invention. Taking a leaf out of his favourite comic books, weedy scientist Howard Lindley was transformed into the gargantuan Bruttu after he inadvertently overloaded an atomic machine.

MONSTROM

Monstrom, "the Dweller in the Black Swamp," debuted in September 1960's *Tales to Astonish* #11. Resembling a kind of proto-Man-Thing, the 20-foot-tall alien crash-landed his spaceship in the Southern US Bayou region, where he remained in suspended animation until being disturbed...

ROMMBU



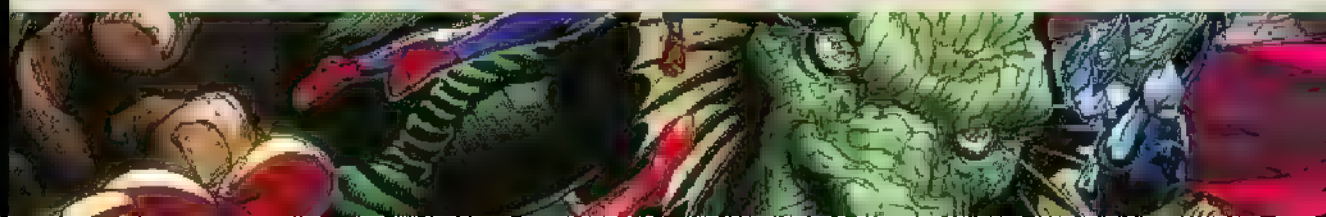
Dating back to May 1961's *Tales to Astonish* #19, Rommbu travelled to Earth to demand humanity's surrender, only to be thwarted by the young John Hunter. Held for a time in the Collector's Canadian-set zoo, he has since faced off against the Hulk and Giant-Man before being exiled to the Negative Zone.

THE GREEN THING

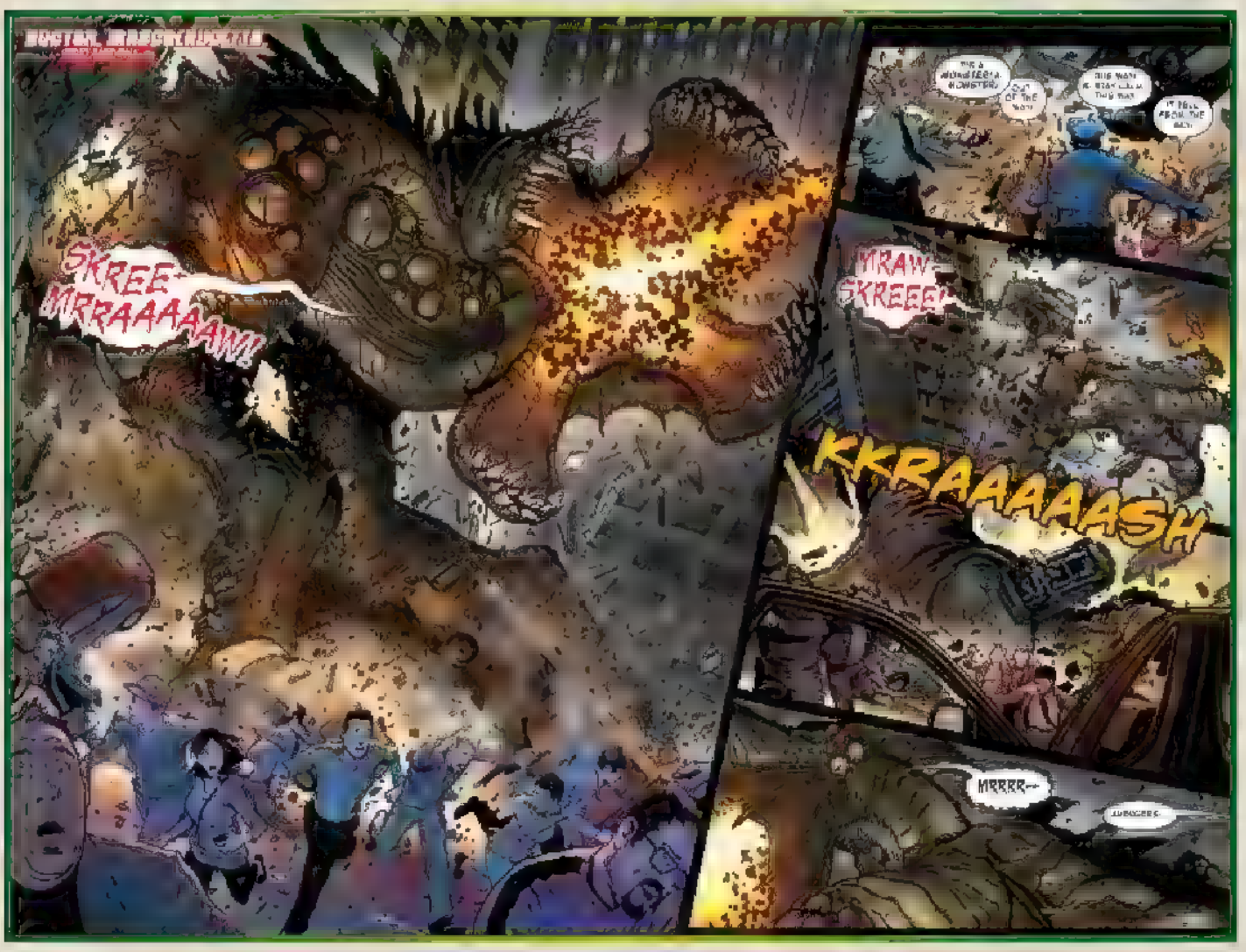
Not actually related to Ben Grimm, The Green Thing is like a malevolent Swamp Thing. As depicted in July 1961's *Tales of Suspense* #19, the evil sentient plant was the result of a botanist pouring an experimental serum on an ordinary weed, which was then transformed into a Triffid-esque creature bent on world domination.

"Basically, if there's a movie featuring a giant monster out there, then I channelled a bit of that into this, especially with some of the newer monsters you'll be seeing. For the classic Marvel Monsters, the absolute best inspiration comes from the old comics in which they first appeared."

The name *Monsters Unleashed* derives from a black and white Marvel magazine that ran from 1973 to 1975 and included the likes of Werewolf By Night, Man Thing and Frankenstein's Monster, but the book also pays tribute to the work of pioneering '60s artists such as Jack Kirby, Steve Ditko and Don Heck. "I was influenced by those legendary creators long before I ever heard of this project, and I can't imagine a comic book creator who hasn't been influenced by them," says Bunn. "You just have to think of the levels of imagination that they brought to the page – it's something to aspire to. Not that I needed the excuse, but working on this project has given me the chance to revisit many of those iconic monster tales from long ago."



As monster hunter Elsa Bloodstone discovers, the larger than life creatures are brought together by the otherworldly Leviathans, an ancient, primeval power already responsible for the destruction of dozens of other planets. And with two new ongoing titles set to spin out of the bi weekly series, Bunn will introduce a couple of new characters as well as revamping several classic Marvel Monsters, some of whom made their debut in the early 1960s, before the advent of the House of Ideas' superhero period.



Above and opposite: A veritable tag team of artists is drawing the core series, and other writers as well as artists take on the spin offs

CURRENT CHALLENGE

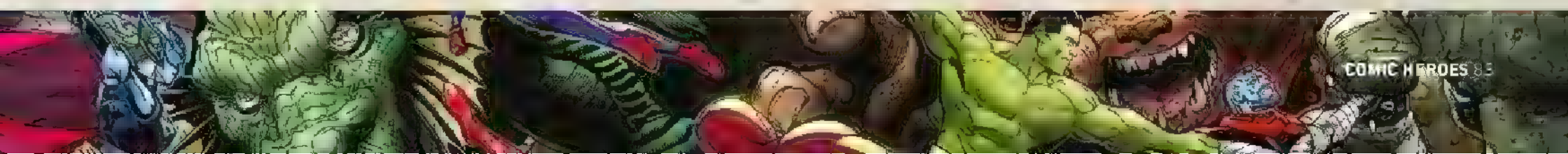
"Some of them are relatively well known and some of them are deep cuts," he explains. "A few of the names that spring to mind are Fin Fang Foom, Goom, Googam, Vandoom's Monster, Bruttu, Devil Dinosaur, Rommbu, Monstrom and the Green Thing. There are so many great old monsters in this story, and my goal is that they will become major players in the Marvel Universe from this day forward."

Instead of a single artist, Bunn is collaborating with a team of top illustrators: Steve McNiven on the first issue, then Greg Land, Leinil Yu, Adam Kubert and Salvador Larroca. "Out of all of them, I've worked with Greg and Salvador before, but I still get a little nervous when writing scripts for them," Bunn admits. "Writing for Steve, Leinil and Adam for the first time was certainly a little daunting, as those folks are masters of their craft, so it's an honour and an absolute pleasure to work with each and every one of them."

And with 30 pages per issue, there will be plenty of space for double page spreads to really evoke the huge spectacle of what unfolds. "They're are really letting their love of the classic Marvel Monsters show, and it's so much fun to see these artists just cut loose on these epic pages of art," says Bunn. "It's just pure mayhem and joy! And what's more, each of the artists and a couple of surprise guest artists - has designed a number of new monsters that will have a huge role to play in this story and in the Marvel Universe as a whole."

If the core *Monsters Unleashed* book wasn't big enough, Marvel is releasing several oversized one-shots in January and February including *Avengers* by Jim Zub and Izaakse, *Deadpool* by Joshua Corin and Tigh Walker, *Doctor Strange* by Chip Zdarsky and Julian Lopez, *Champions* by Jeremy Whitley, Ro Stein and Ted Brandt, *All New X Men* by Whitley and Carlo Barberi, and *Uncanny Inhumans* by Paul Allor and Brian Level.

"I'm focusing solely on the main series and I won't be writing any of the tie ins," says Bunn. "However, I've talked to some of the creators involved with those books, and I've seen all the outlines and scripts so far. Editorial sends them my way because they want to make sure that what everyone else is doing works with what I have planned. But I have to tell you, I just have such a lot of fun reading those stories and seeing how the event is being expanded by others." CH



OUT OF HELL--A HERO!

DANCE
THE
IVE
HARLEM
RRRREE
EEEEEEEEEEE
LOOK CLOSELY AT THE FIGURE BEFORE YOU. STUDY HIM, STUDY HIS COSTUME. THIS IS LUKE CAGE NOW. A SUPER-HERO... YET UNLIKE ANY OTHER BEFORE HIM.
BUT HE WAS NOT ALWAYS AS YOU SEE HIM. BEFORE THE SUPER-HERO, THERE WAS THE MAN.
WHAT FOLLOWS THEN IS THE STORY OF THAT MAN...THE MAKING OF A STRANGELY UNIQUE SUPER-HERO!

A BLAZING NEW MARVEL MILESTONE!

EDITED BY: STAN LEE · WRITTEN BY: ARCHIE GOODWIN · DRAWN BY: GEORGE TUSKA

BILLY GRAHAM INKER · SKIP KOHLOFF LETTERER

WITH THE CONSIDERABLE CREATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF: ROY THOMAS AND JOHN ROMITA

HARLEM HERO

CHRISTMAS! JUST HOW DID A CHARACTER CREATED TO CASH-IN ON THE BLAXPLOITATION CRAZE OF THE 1970s BECOME HAILED AS POSSIBLY THE HIGHLIGHT OF MARVEL'S CINEMATIC UNIVERSE? **DAVID BARNETT** FINDS OUT...

It's been a long, strange, crazy trip for Luke Cage, AKA Power Man, AKA Hero For Hire. The world knows Luke Cage now, thanks to the brooding performance of Mike Colter in the title role of the Netflix series, which follows the modern Marvel formula pioneered in the landmark *Daredevil*, of using the small screen to explore the darker and murkier corners of the Cinematic Universe, while the Avengers and the Guardians of the Galaxy work on a more shiny, global and even cosmic level.

But before Colter's guest appearance in *Jessica Jones* – another Marvel TV street-level hit – Cage wasn't ever really one of the Marvel Universe big-hitters, despite being pretty handy with his steel-hard fists.

But where did Luke Cage come from? In comic terms, his origin was on the mean streets of Harlem in New York, where the young Carl Lucas ran with a gang called The Rivals, along with his best friend Willis Stryker.

Lucas embarked on a career of petty crime with his fellow ne'er-do-wells, at the behest of gang boss Tony Caputo – known as "The Hammer". But Lucas has a conscience, and is worried that his nascent criminal career is hurting his father, so he tries to turn away from a life of crime.

STARTING AT THE BOTTOM...

His pal Stryker continues on his trajectory, however, rising through the gang ranks until he comes to the attention of Marvel's Mafia-alike organised crime syndicate the Maggia, whose thugs beat Stryker half to death... his life being saved only by the intervention of old friend Lucas.

Rather inevitably, a woman comes between the two friends. Stryker's girlfriend Reva goes to Lucas with her worries about Willis's dangerous life, but Stryker, leaping to the conclusion that his ›

Right: One of the coolest incarnations of Cage is this one by Genndy Tartakovsky, creator of *Dexter's Laboratory* and *Hotel Transylvania*.

ALL IMAGES © MARVEL COMICS

girl has been up to no good with his childhood friend, takes revenge by planting heroin in Lucas's apartment and getting the innocent Lucas, trying to stay on the straight and narrow, sent directly to jail without passing Go.

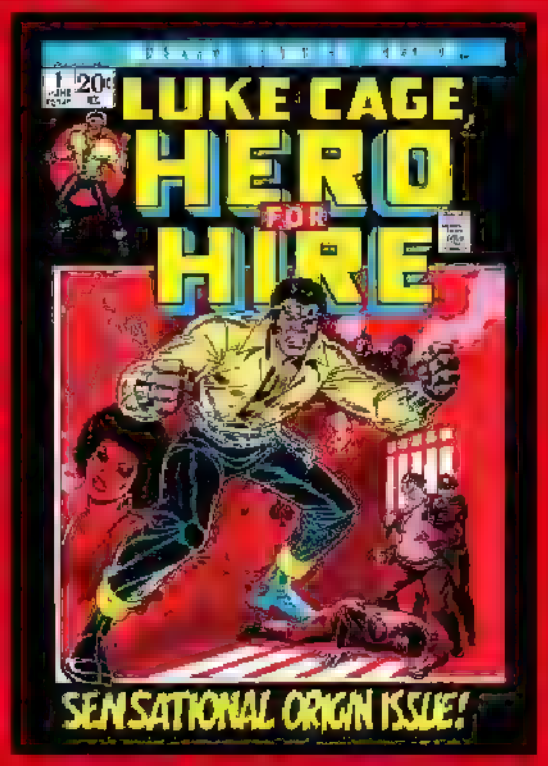
In chokey, Lucas comes to the unwelcome attention of racist guard Rackham, and also one Dr Noah Burstein, who in the manner of Marvel scientists has been trying to replicate the Super Soldier Serum that gave Captain America his powers. He thinks he's come up with a workable stab at it, but needs a volunteer to test it on. Lucas duly steps up to the plate, but while he's strapped in Burstein's contraption, redneck Rackham takes the opportunity to spin a few dials and push a few buttons in the hope of causing some serious damage to Lucas.

His intervention, of course, has the opposite result, giving Lucas superhuman strength, rock-hard skin and the means to escape prison and return to New York where he adopts the cunning alias Luke Cage and realises that the hero business can actually turn a half-decent profit.

That's the comic-book origin, at any rate. In real life, Luke Cage was born out of a trend that began to emerge with the 1971 movie *Shaft*, in which hard-as-nails private detective John Shaft is hired by a Harlem mobster to find his daughter, kidnapped by Italian gangsters. *Shaft* and the movies that followed were quickly labelled "Blaxploitation" – the lives of Black Americans usually drifting around the edges – if not at the centre – of thrillingly criminal activity, packaged up for the delectation of white audiences.

Indeed, according to Jason Sacks, author of *The American Comic Book Chronicles: the 1970s*, when *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire* was unveiled at Creation Con in 1971, the book was described as being a "combination of Superman and Shaft".

Luke Cage had the distinction of being the first black Marvel character to headline his own book. In an interview for Sacks's book, Roy Thomas told of the Bullpen origin of Cage, and where his name came from. Thomas said: "Stan Lee didn't want a typical super hero name for the comic, but wanted him to want to make a paying career of crime-busting, and was looking for a title. I had some months ago written an *Avengers* issue called 'Heroes for Hire,' so I suggested Hero for Hire. Stan also wanted a good one-word name for him that was atypical, and I suggested 'Cage.' It was only later – when it was too late to rescind – that I realised I had subconsciously taken that name from a list of hero



Above: The current series of *Power Man and Iron Fist* is written by David F Walker and drawn by Sanford Greene.

Below: Bill Graham (not the evangelist), inker and later solo artist on the first Luke Cage series, was one of a handful of African Americans active in mainstream comics in the 1970s.

names that Gil Kane had shown me some time before. [The name] 'Chane', which he later used for a sword-and-sorcery hero, was also on that list.] I apologised to Gil for that, but he said not to worry about it. 'There were plenty more names out there.'

Artist John Romita designed the very Blaxploitation look for Cage, from his open-necked yellow shirt to his chain-link belt and the steel headband he wore.

But there are perhaps other connotations in both Cage's name and look that might have only been subconscious at the time. "Cage" might imply the prison that Lucas was in, but also the slavery of a previous era... And the chain around his waist might have similar symbolic connotations. So was Luke Cage just a caricature born of Blaxploitation?

MORE THAN A TOKEN

"My cousin and I loved Luke Cage when we were kids, but we also thought it was ridiculous", says David F. Walker, writer of Cage's current Marvel series, *Power Man and Iron Fist*. "Growing up in a black household, we didn't know anyone that talked like Luke Cage. So, yeah, we loved him, but we didn't take him that serious.

"But at the same time, he was one of the few black characters in comics at that time – especially with his own title – and that meant the world to us. It didn't matter that he sounded like some white guy's idea of what a black person talked like, we were just happy to have a character that looked like us."

That's something series artist Sanford Greene can relate to. Greene says it's "an honour and a dream come true" to be bringing back Cage, and adds: "Of course there were stereotypes in the book when it came out, but that is the nature of society. However, as a kid I saw a black superhero in a Marvel comic book and I was sold! Over the years there have been some ups and downs but I think Cage is in a very vital place currently."

Above The origin of Luke Cage, Hero for Hire, deliberately drew on the feel and conventions of the Blaxploitation fad of the time.

Greene's favourite runs over the varied history of the title were those by Mary Jo Duffy and by Billy Graham, and he says he fell in love with a Bill Sienkiewicz promo illustration for *Power Man*

> "HE SOUNDED LIKE SOME WHITE GUY'S IDEA OF WHAT A BLACK PERSON TALKED LIKE. IT DIDN'T MATTER"

SUNDAY MORNING 5:57 A.M.
IT IS A DECIDEDLY ANGRY LUKE CAGE WHO EXITS FROM HIS OFFICE IN THESE PRE-DAWN HOURS--
--WITHOUT BOTHERING TO OPEN THE DOOR
MOTHER OF--! WHAT KINDA GARBAGE WAS THAT PUBLIC-DEFENDER TYPE TRYIN' TO FEED ME? CALLIN' ME FROM THE TOMBS TO TELL ME THAT PHIL FOX'S BEEN OFFED--
--BY CLAIRE TEMPLE!
HE'S WHO IS IN TURMOIL AS HE RACES FROM HIS THIRD-FLOOR WALK-UP YOU SEE, ME AND CLAIRE HAVE NEVER SPOKEN OF LOVE EXACTLY BUT WHEN SHE NEEDED HELP, SHE CALLED HIM--
--AND PERHAPS THAT LENDS URGENCY TO HIS STEPS
FOX BEEN BUGGIN' ME 'BOUT SEAGATE. MEBBE HE EVEN TOLD CLAIRE...
BUT SHE WOULDN'T MURDER HIM, NOT EVEN TO PROTECT ME!
GOTTA BE A FRAME...
BUT, WHY?
WHY?
5:59 A.M.
SHADES AND COHAUNTS HAVE POSTPONED THEIR REVENGE--IF ONLY FOR THE MOMENT. THEY PLAN TO STAY AROUND THE BIG APPLE FOR A LONG TIME, AND EVEN NOW, THEY APPROACH A MEANS TO THAT END--
THIS IS WHY I SAID RACKHAM COULD WAIT FOR A WHILE, MY FELLOW! WE GOTTA THINK OF OUR FUTURE IN THIS B & C CITY--
--AND THE PROF IS FROM THIS LITTLE VENTURE WILL GIVE US THE STAKE WE NEED TO START OUR OWN BUG NESS
THIS IS MORE THAN A HEIST-- IT'S AN INVESTMENT! THIS IS ONE OF HARLEM'S LARGEST LIQUOR STORE CHAINS & WE GET PROTECTION MONEY FROM IT--
FRIEDMANS LIQUORS
--AND ALL THE OTHERS WILL FALL RIGHT IN STEP!
CROSSTOWN CLAIRE TEMPLE LOOKS AT THE DAWN'S FIRST RAYS AND TRIES TO SORT THINGS OUT. SHE'S LEARNED THAT A MAN SHE LOVES IS AN ESCAPED CONVICT. SHE HERSELF FACES A MURDER CHARGE.
SHE DOESN'T KNOW HOW RACKHAM IS, CAN'T IDENTIFY HIM, CAN'T PROVE HE SHOT FOX
SHE'LL REMAIN SILENT, OF COURSE, FOR LUKE'S SAKE
BUT DOES THAT MEAN SHE'LL HAVE TO PAY FOR HIS FREEDOM WITH HER LIFE?

and Iron Fist, which made him want to draw the duo.

Walker first came across Cage in the 1970s. "*Power Man* #32 was the first issue I ever saw," he recalls. "Back in those days, you bought comics at the newsstand or at the drug store, and it wasn't uncommon to miss multiple issues of any given title. My next issue was #37, and I remember the cover just blew my mind."

The cover in question was indeed a particularly dynamic one. Cage somersaulting through the air and crashing through the roof of some hood's car. It was an image and a character that stayed with Walker, and when Marvel's editor-in-chief Axel Alonso asked Walker for a dream list of characters he'd love to write, Power Man and Iron Fist was at the top.

"I never thought it would happen," he says. "Then one day while I was grocery shopping, I got the phone call..."

Artist Afua Richardson, currently working on Marvel's Black Panther spin-off *World of Wakanda*, says Cage was typical of the two-dimensional portrayal of people of colour at the time when he was first introduced. "He didn't seem like a superhero to me, just a guy in a discount suit. A lot of characters at that time were too on the nose when it came to their identity as a black character. It was a product of the time. There was often a mention of slavery, some reference to being black in their name covered in words like 'midnight' or 'dark'. I just find it incredibly funny."

The writing duties on the first Luke Cage run fell to Archie Goodwin. Sacks observes: "Though white himself, Goodwin had written a number of comics that featured African-American lead characters for Warren magazines and other publishers. In addition, Goodwin brought an attitude to the book that was different from many of Marvel's other writers."

When it came to David F Walker spinning his own take on Cage, he knew what he wanted to do. He says: "Luke has evolved and transformed a lot over the years, and I wanted to honour that by making sure he grew more as a character. I wanted to show a sense of maturity and wisdom that comes with age and experience. I also decided that Luke was the one superhero that all the other superheroes respected the most – that he was the one everyone felt they could turn to in a time of need, and that this feeling would inform how others acted around him."

DIFFERENT ATTITUDE

In addition to being the first black lead in Marvel comics, Luke Cage was also notable for taking a pragmatic approach to the superhero gig. Spider-Man was driven by remorse for allowing his Uncle Ben to die, Captain America by duty. Luke Cage was purely in it for the money, hence his tag line: Hero for Hire. It was part of his whole street-smart vibe.

Somewhere along the way Cage also picked up the name Power Man, presumably because someone decided he really needed a proper superhero name as well, although it seemed pretty pointless with no mask and an open identity (though he had rebuilt his life from his original Carl Lucas existence). It did perhaps offer a pithier title

Above: From the start, Luke Cage's world was much more down-to-earth than those of his Marvel stablemates like the Fantastic Four.

Below: Iantakovsky's *Cage* is set in the '70s but very modern in its sensibilities.

to one of the enduring partnerships in Marvel comics – Power Man and Iron Fist. The straight-talking Cage and the rather otherworldly martial artist who'd learned his trade in the extra-dimensional city of K'un-L'un might have seemed odd bedfellows at first, but in the comics they became firm friends.

Forty-five years since his creation, is Cage still relevant today? Does he have a place in Donald Trump's America? Walker thinks so. "Cage is important today because there are still so few black characters in mainstream American comics," he says. "Representation now isn't much better than it was when I was a kid growing up. As for his place in Trump's America... Like many people of African descent in this country, I have long known that there is more than one America. This thing being called 'Trump's America' is the one that has about as much use for Luke Cage as it does for me, as it did for my family going all the way back to slavery. It doesn't recognise us as being humans, and it may not want us here, but we're here."

Greene too thinks Luke Cage's role in modern life is "very important. He's a fixer of pride and power for young men all over, black or other."

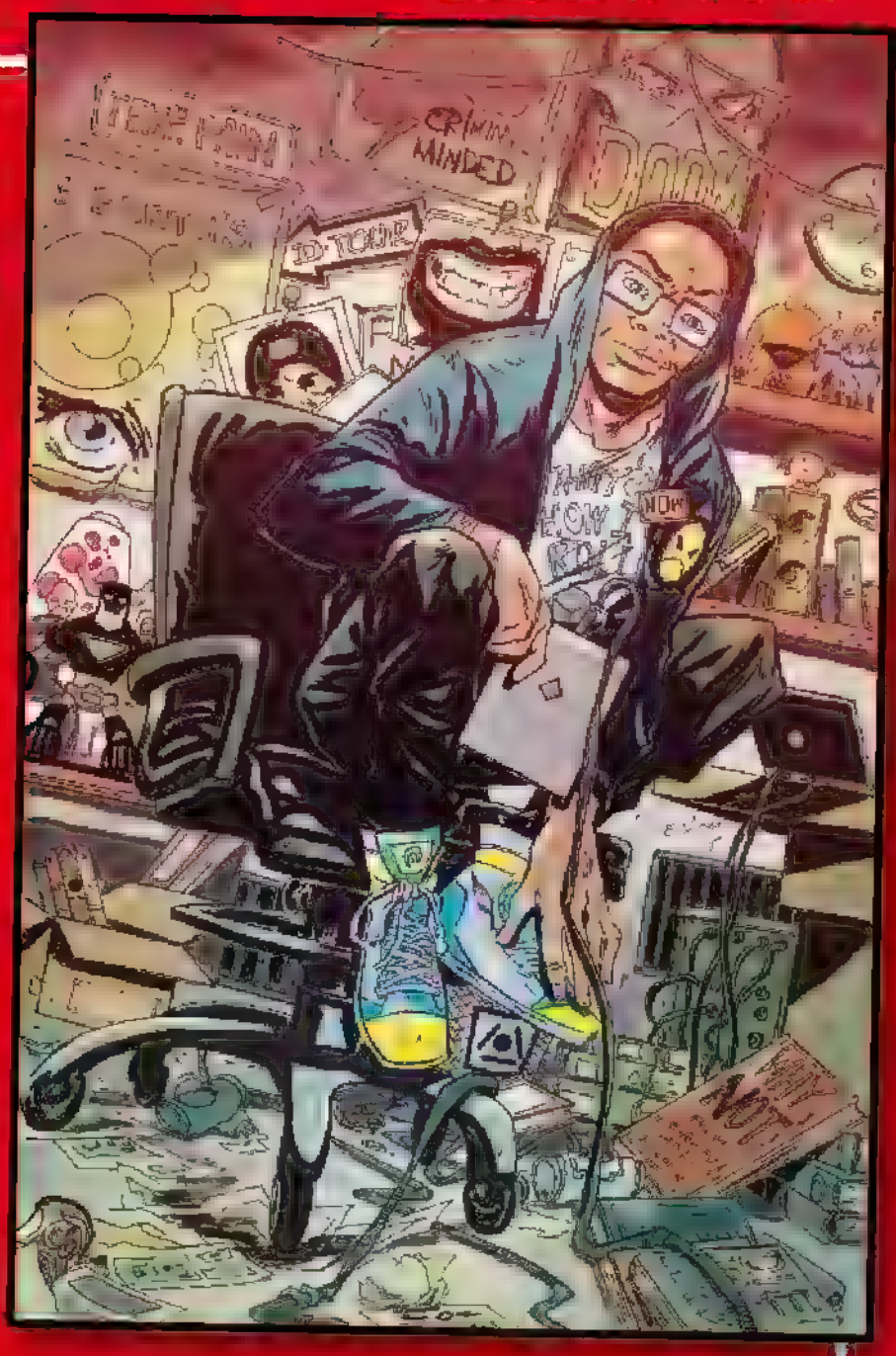
With a second series of the Luke Cage Netflix series already announced, it seems that Cage is not just relevant today, but essential. "Honestly, I never thought I'd live to see a live-action Luke Cage, let alone one that drew so much from the amazing way he was written by Brian Michael Bendis," says Walker.

Afua Richardson agrees. "The Netflix series was amazing," she enthuses. "The tie-in with *Jessica Jones* and *Daredevil* was subtle. The soundtrack was nostalgic but not heavy-handed, and Luke as a person was a composite of so many people I personally know. It felt like I was back home on 145th Street and St Nicholas Place in Harlem."

There's an interesting post-script to the Luke Cage story from Jason Sacks' book, where he reproduces an internal memo from 1972 that circulated around the Marvel offices considering the marketability of their then current stable of characters.

Properties were awarded a star rating for their potential, with three signifying very important, two stars important, and one "not so important". It's interesting to see that while Captain America, Spider-Man, the Hulk and the Avengers are all three-star winners, along with most of the Fantastic Four (although poor old Invisible Girl rates only two), another of the top-rated characters in the list is Luke Cage.

So while he might have been born out of rather dubious reasons, on the back of the Blaxploitation bandwagon, it was rather prescient of Marvel to identify Cage as one of their most marketable titles, even if 45 years ago nobody in the Marvel organisation could even in their wildest dreams have foreseen the internet, let alone Netflix, or the fact that a show with an almost entirely black cast could be hailed as one of the most accomplished and culturally significant things Marvel has ever produced. CH



this page: Santiago Greene's confidently relaxed art style is perfect for *Power Man* – less glossy than a lot of superhero art these days but with the assured realism of sketches from life.

> "HE'S IMPORTANT BECAUSE THERE ARE STILL SO FEW BLACK CHARACTERS IN MAINSTREAM U.S. COMICS"

COMMANDO!

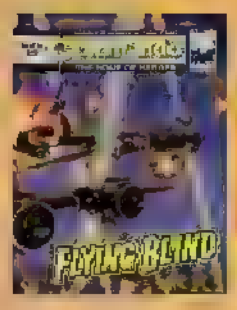
As Dundee-based D.C. Thomson publishes the 5,000th issue of *Commando*, **Paul F. Cockburn** asks how this iconic title continues to thrive

"*Commando for Action and Adventure* – to give the line its full title – is arguably British comics' greatest survivor. Yes, *2000 AD* triumphantly published its 2,000th Prog back in September 2016, but this small "digest" comic line – with its distinctive 18x14cm (7x5.5 inch) format, black-and-white interior artwork, single story per issue and overt lack of "free gifts" – will soon see its 5,000th edition on the nation's newsstands, in an uninterrupted run going back to July 1961.

D.C. Thomson, publisher of *The Beano* and *The Dandy*, launched *Commando War Stories in Pictures* to challenge Fleetway/IPC's *War Picture Library*, also digest sized, which had begun in 1958, but *Commando* has long outlived its rival. So how has this single line of comics survived when so many others have fallen, whether weekly war comics such as *Warlord* and *Battle* or anthology titles like *The Victor* and *Valiant*?

"*Commando* has a huge wealth of history to draw upon for inspiration, from the Cold War to the Roman Empire, which means there is plenty of opportunity for fresh and exciting stories to be told," says Kirsten Murray, current editor of Heritage Brands at D.C. Thomson and the first woman to edit *Commando* in its 55 year history. "It often steps further than a battle between 'good vs. evil', and instead questions a human's actions in extraordinary, often punishing, circumstances. Since each issue brings a completely new story, readers are able to dip in and out of the series as they please."

Right: It may seem surprising in today's world, but *Commando* war stories continue to sell steadily, with four titles released every two weeks



"As a boy growing up in Belfast in the 1980s," says *2000 AD* artist P.J. Holden, "*Commando* comics represented an escape to simpler times when bad guys screamed 'Hände Hoch!' and the brutal Boche could be put down by a simple punch to the jaw. It painted >

a bright explosive world in the glory of black and white. The fact that there were armed soldiers walking Belfast's streets while I read war comics seemed to just make them cooler."

Yet it can't just be the subject matter: war stories were a staple of British boys' weeklies for most of the 20th century, but even the first really successful war comics, *Warlord* and *Battle*, which began in the early 1970s, did not survive the '80s. Calum Laird, who was *Commando*'s fourth editor until he retired in 2015, is currently working on a PhD on the rise and fall of British war comics and has spoken to many of the industry's leading editors and contributors as part of his research.

"I spoke with Pat Mills, who's famous for, amongst many other things, Charlie's War, probably the ultimate British war comic story," Laird says. "Pat felt that British comics lost their way in the 1980s, they became a bit self indulgent and more concerned with a vocal minority than the generality of their readers and, as a result, circulations began to fall. I first worked on *Commando* back in 1981 and the story values have never really changed – some of the language and characterisations have, but not the stories.

"Also, they were and are meticulously researched. Under Charles 'Chick' Checkley [editor 1961-71], *Commando* kept a tight grip on it. Ian Forbes, who edited *Commando* for 17 years [1971-88], wanted absolutely everything correct. He wouldn't play fast and loose with tanks and guns everything had to be right. His successor George Low [1988-2007] inherited that structure, as did I.

"The market for war comics, as it existed then, wanted things to be right. If you didn't, you either had to go down the comedy route like Captain Hurricane in *Valiant* or just give it up. That was definitely part of it. I have seen stories rejected on the basis that they were technically inaccurate."

This attention to detail is something that illustrator Janek Matysiak, who drew his first *Commando* in 1990 fresh out of art college, appreciates. "I do like the research, that it's not just generic," he says. "The language of *Commando* comes easy to me." Like many of the people who have worked on the title in recent years, Janek grew up reading *Commando*. "My father was a D.C. Thomson artist, though he drew for *Diana*, *Jackie* and other girls' comics, so during my childhood, I was given *Victor*, *Hotspur* and *Commando*."

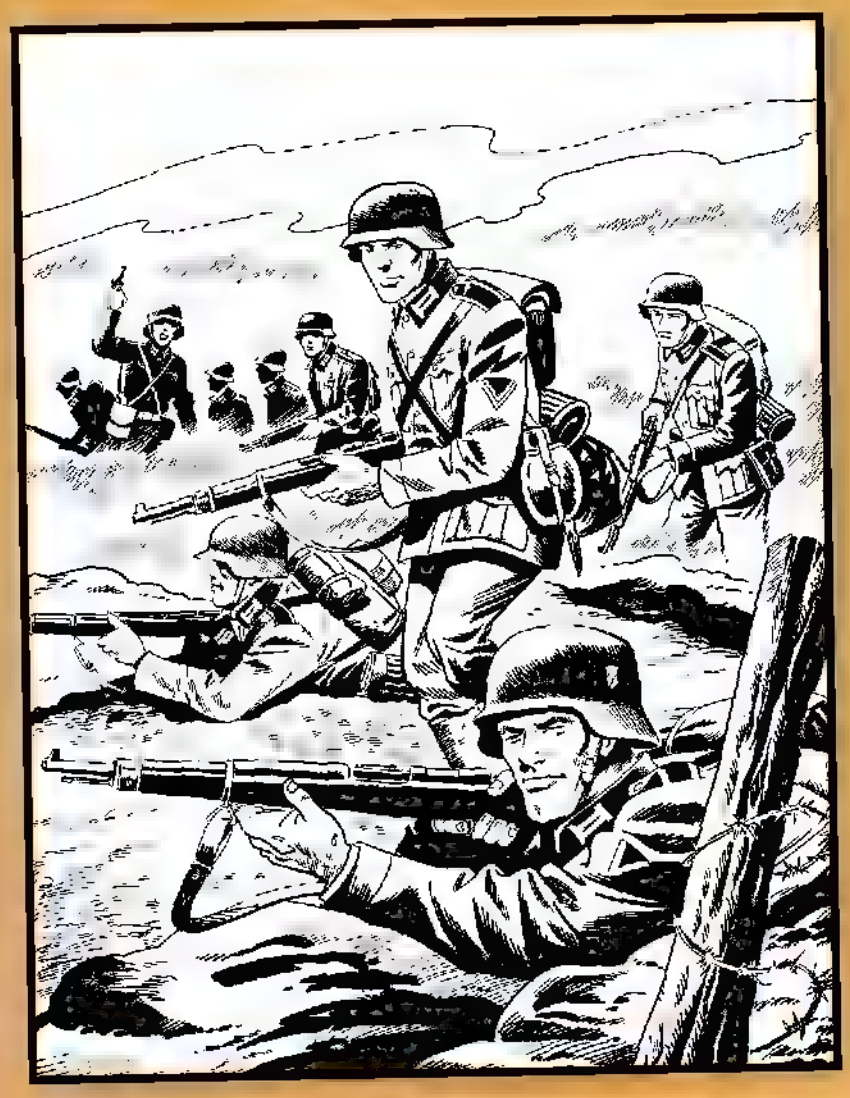
Above: Although stories have been set in almost every conceivable theatre of war, World War II continues to be the most common

Below: Artists are still required to stay meticulously accurate in all details of clothing, weaponry and equipment

GREAT SURVIVOR

Commando has also outlived other titles that opted for a similar digest format: *War Picture Library* folded in 1984, as did later rival line *Battle Picture Library* [also Fleetway/IPC]. Sci-fi sister title *Starblazer*, which famously gave Grant Morrison some of his earliest work, lasted from 1979 to January 1991. "*Starblazer* was somewhat overtaken," admits Laird. "It was going up against the likes of *2000 AD*, which were full colour and anthology as well. It had a hard furrow to hoe."

Yet as other war comics and strips vanished from newsagents'



shelves, *Commando* flourished. "I believe that *Commando*'s highest ever monthly circulation was actually in 1984," Laird adds, "by which time, anyone who's interested in British comics would tell you, nearly everything had disappeared. If you wanted to read war stories, *Commando* became the only regular one."

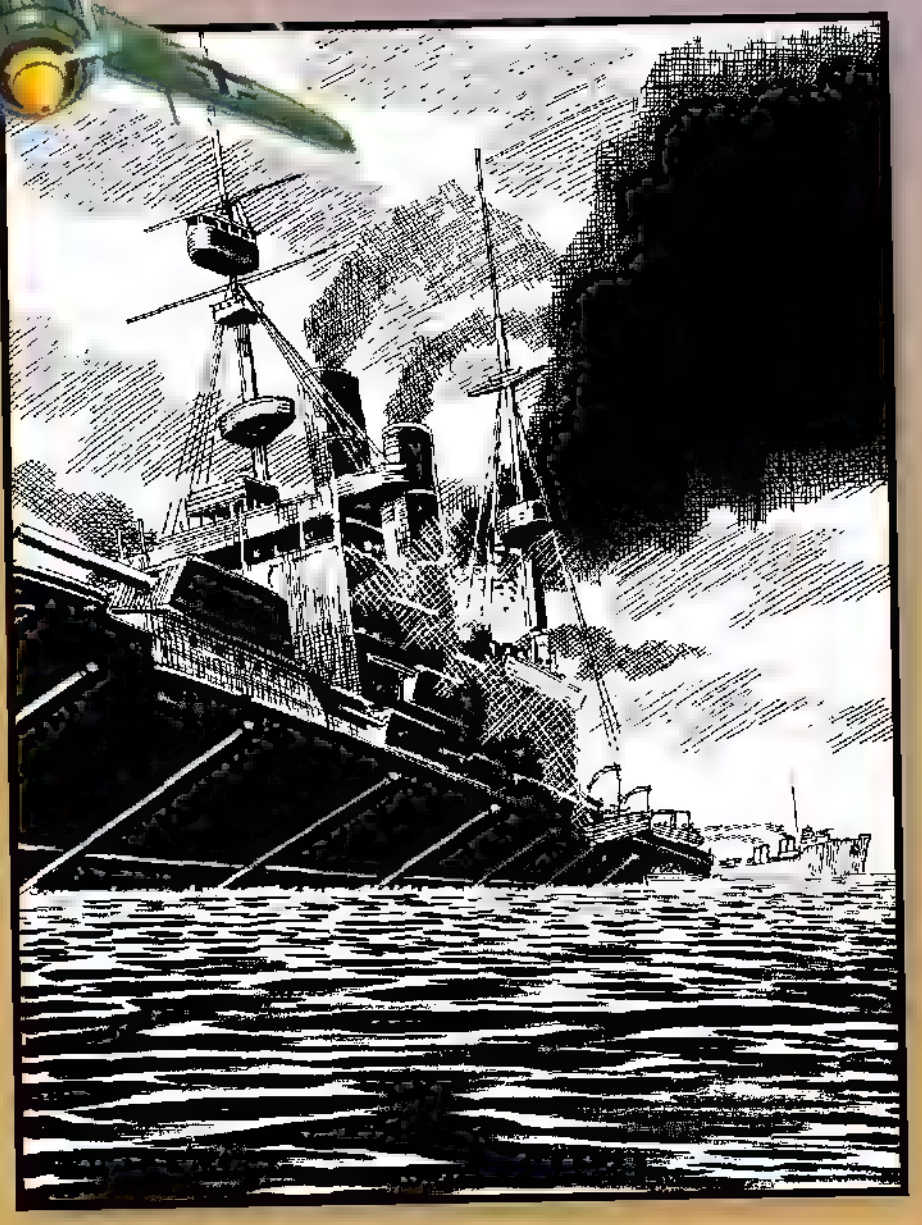
Arguably another factor in *Commando*'s survival is the number of titles: currently, four titles are released every fortnight, ensuring a "critical mass on a newsagent's shelf". Admittedly, at least half of these *Commando* comics are reprints from the extensive back catalogue, including a Gold Collection (stories first published 50 years ago) and a Silver Collection (from 25 years ago). This is significant, though: the long term consistency of *Commando* stories is simply confirmed by how little these have needed to be updated. "We had to change a little bit of the text sometimes," Laird admits, "but not very often."

This exploitable heritage, which has also seen stories reprinted in hardback editions by Carlton Books, is definitely a factor in *Commando*'s survival; so too has been the fact that it is published by D.C. Thomson. "Back in the 1980s, Thomson were probably the biggest single publisher of children's and teen titles; they had a really sophisticated distribution system, so they could get *Commando* into the smallest newsagent," Laird points out. "Thomson titles were also generally cheaper than the opposition Dundee was a cheaper place to produce stuff than London, for a kick off. As a firm, they didn't have huge borrowings, they were very financially stable and there were no public shareholders. That allowed them to plough their own furrow."

21ST CENTURY COMMANDO

Not that *Commando* is in any way stuck in the past. "War comics do face the difficult challenge of telling entertaining action stories whilst treating past events and the soldiers that served in action respectfully," says current editor Kirsten Murray. "The face of the world has vastly changed since the eras in which many *Commando* stories are set, so it's important to attempt to move away from stereotyping and language that would now be seen as offensive. We also steer clear of more recent conflicts, such as the war in the Middle East, as we are aware that the impact of recent wars and military missions are still raw wounds for many."

Laird agrees. "During George's tenure, the scope of the conflicts widened out from the Second World War and there was a conscious decision to feature more heroes from the 'other side', because it became obvious that not all Germans were Nazis. It's quite interesting to note that the Italians were the first to be rehabilitated in that respect, then the Germans though, to a certain extent, the Japanese have never been rehabilitated in British war comics. Particularly during the Cold War there was definitely a reluctance to make the Russians the heroes, for fairly obvious reasons although a lot of those 'Enemy Hero' stories took place in Russia!"



Above: For most of its history, like most UK comics, *Commando* did not credit artists or writers in print, but readers recognise the work of their favourite creators (like artist Keith Page, above)

There's also a practical reason for this. "You really need a good big canvas to tell a good story," Laird adds. "The narrative of the Falklands War is very well known, for example, so it's very difficult to weave fiction into it. It has been done successfully by a small number of our authors and artists, but you have to be really sure of what you're doing."

So what of the future? Issue 5000 is written by prolific *Commando* contributor Ferg Handley, who also regularly writes *Spectacular Spider Man* for Panini/Marvel UK. "We have a new editorial team in place which is passionate about the brand and the direction it can go in," says Murray. "Despite *Commando* being 55 years old, we feel its potential is still largely untapped, so keep your eyes peeled for lots of exciting *Commando* this year." CH

> "THE MARKET WANTED THINGS TO BE RIGHT. STORIES WERE REJECTED FOR BEING INACCURATE"

ET DUST ? ON NE S'EST PAS OCCUPÉ DE DUST...

JE VEUX LA VALISE DU PETIT PÈTE-SEC ! AVEC CE QU'IL Y A DEDANS, ON SERA LES ROIS !... IL FAUT LA FAUCHER AU CROCHET DE LA RIVIÈRE AVANT QUE LE COURANT NE L'EMPORTE, TU PEUX COMPRENDRE ÇA, EH, TRAYEUR DE BOEUFS ?

C'EST ÉPOUVANTABLE ! MONSIEUR CAVENDISH A DISPARU AUSSI !

NON ! LÀ ! IL ÉMERGE !... QUEL HOMME ! MOI, JE ...

JAMAIS !... JAMAIS JE N'AI TIRÉ SUR UN HOMME... MAIS CETTE FOIS ...

NON, PETIT, NE DEVIENS PAS COMME TOUS CEUX-LÀ. ÇA NE TE QUITTERAIT PLUS JAMAIS. "VIE POUR VIE", C'EST UN FAUX ENJEU...

DISPARUS... J'AURAIS PU...

SÛREMENT, MAIS C'EST MIEUX AINSI. VOYONS CE QU'ON PEUT FAIRE POUR LE COCHER ET TON AMI, VITE...

AU FOND D'UN BROUILLARD ROUGE, UN HURLEMENT DE RAGE ET DE DOULEUR ROULAIT DANS LE CERVEAU DE RED DUST : **TU LE SAVAIS, POURTANT, QU'IL Y AVAIT UN DEUXIÈME HOMME !...**

LA COLÈRE DU VAINCU SURMONTAIT SA DEMI-CONSCIENCE. DOBBS N'AVAIT PAS FINI SON TRAVAIL, MAIS LE MONDE OÙ SE RÉVEILLERAIT DUST AVAIT BASCULÉ EN MÊME TEMPS QUE LA DILIGENCE... LE COMBAT DES FAUVES ALLAIT REPARTIR À ZÉRO, LES TEMPS SAUVAGES REVENAIENT SUR LA BLACK RIVER INDIFFÉRENTE...

HERMANN

A Man of Characters

A grandmaster of the European adventure comic, Hermann has had an international following since his work appeared in the early days of *Heavy Metal*. ***Paul Gravett*** talks to Hermann about his 50-year career

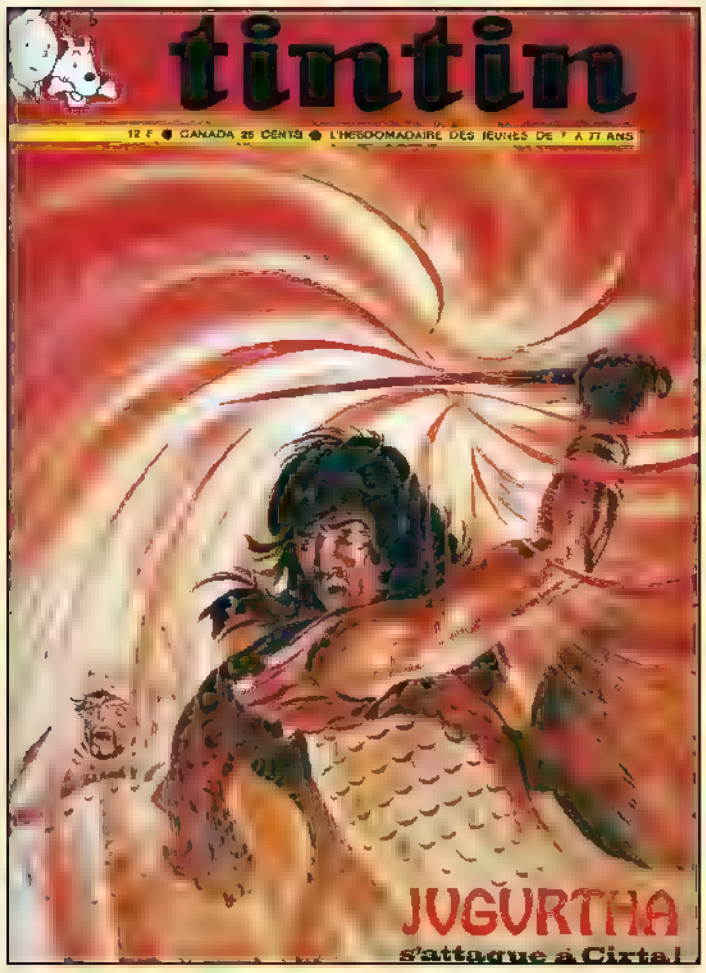
Hermann Huppen is one of Belgium's greatest contemporary creators of realistic adventure comics across a wide range of genres. In the '60s, his gutsy illustration helped to re energise the weekly *Tintin* magazine, where he drew Michel Greg's serials about the seafaring action man Bernard Prince and the feisty heiress to Ranch 666, known only as Comanche. Hermann then went solo and has not looked back, writing his own stories, most famously the post apocalyptic epic *Jeremiah*.

Now 78, with a career of over 50 years, Hermann shows no signs of slowing down. As well as continuing to write and draw *Jeremiah*, he has taken to working in dazzling watercolours and creating a string of hugely diverse one shot albums and short series, many written by Yves H., pen name of his son. Hermann never flinches from portraying the ugliness of so called humanity, but if he was a complete pessimist, he wouldn't continue making his compelling comics.

In 2016, Hermann won the Grand Prix or Lifetime Achievement Award at the Angoulême International Comics Festival, and at the 2017 Festival he is being honoured with a major retrospective. Prizes and acclaim don't mean as much to this vigorous veteran as working on more stories, his next being the trilogy *Duke*, a return to hard hitting Westerns, again written by his son. Outspoken and passionate about his medium and his messages, Hermann was interviewed as the special guest of the Comics Forum Conference on Genre, part of 2016's Thought Bubble Sequential Art Festival in Leeds. On a flipchart during the break before, he drew a beautiful lightning sketch of a galloping horse, which poured onto the page, his pen barely lifting off the paper.

COMIC HEROES: What brought you into the comics field?

HERMANN HUPPEN: I started by studying interior design. I worked for Expo 58 in Brussels, and I was employed as a cabinet maker for two weeks. Then I worked as an interior designer, until I met Philip Vandooren, the man who would become



"I like to stick to reality, no illusions about mankind"

my brother in law and editor in-chief of the Belgian weekly comic *Spirou*. Vandooren saw a little scribble of mine and he said "You've got a good hand, why don't you try making comics?" He got me my first commission in 1964, a short comic for *Plein Feu*, a scouting magazine he was editing.

CH: Had you been in the scouts, like Hergé?

HH: I was a boy scout for only one year, because I got into a fight with them!

CH: Was Jijé (Joseph Gillain) one of your early influences?

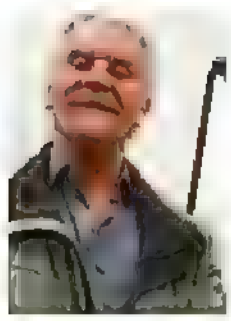
HH: Yes, Jijé was crazy but a very nice guy. I was very impressed by his drawing, though he suffered from poor motivation. He didn't like comics very much, he preferred to be a painter. But he had to make money, he had a big family and his paintings weren't selling, so he kept drawing comics. Jijé had high moments sometimes but also very low. The beginning of his Western, *Jerry Spring*, was a high point with his powerful chiaroscuro brushwork.

CH: You broke into *Spirou* with occasional short educational comics.

HH: Yes, but they were only six pages at most to keep me busy. This wasn't my goal. I wanted to work full time in that field.

Above Hermann's noir thriller *Lien de Sang*, scripted by his son Yves, is published in English by Dark Horse as *Blood Ties*

Above right Historical adventure *Jugurtha* appeared in *Tintin*



So mornings I worked in the architect's firm and in the afternoon I tried to make comics to show to publishers. My future scriptwriter Michel Greg saw these pieces and called me to join his studio, at least for a trial period. Greg was working as chief manager of a studio with different draughtsmen. I quit the architect's office as soon as he asked me to join the club.

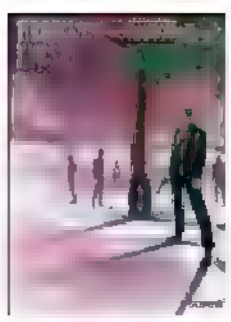
Greg was a writer and cartoonist as well, so he understood the whole process. But he was a very bad teacher – he was humiliating. Whenever there was something wrong, he would tear up your artwork. I was all set to leave or punch him on the nose! Finally

PHOTO : AMERON FLETCHER

he cooled down and we worked together for 18 years.

CH: Your partnership began in *Spirou*'s rival, *Tintin*, in 1966 with *Bernard Prince*. Initially an Interpol agent appearing in complete episodes, he became an adventurer, after he inherited a boat and set sail around the globe with his two companions.
HH: Bernard Prince started as a clean cut guy, brushing his teeth every day. That was what the period demanded, but *Tintin* needed to change, because starting in 1959 the French magazine *Pilote* had changed a lot in bandes dessinées they brought in some non respect for the rules, like in the Western *Lieutenant Blueberry* by Charlier and Giraud. *Bernard Prince* became very popular as a serial, because Greg had a sense of humour, bringing in Prince's rough and ready companion Barney Gordon. Like Tintin and Captain Haddock, if you have a very clean leading man, you need a wilder partner. In 2010, I made a new Bernard Prince album with my son, even better than Greg's, but it's not selling. It's of its time.

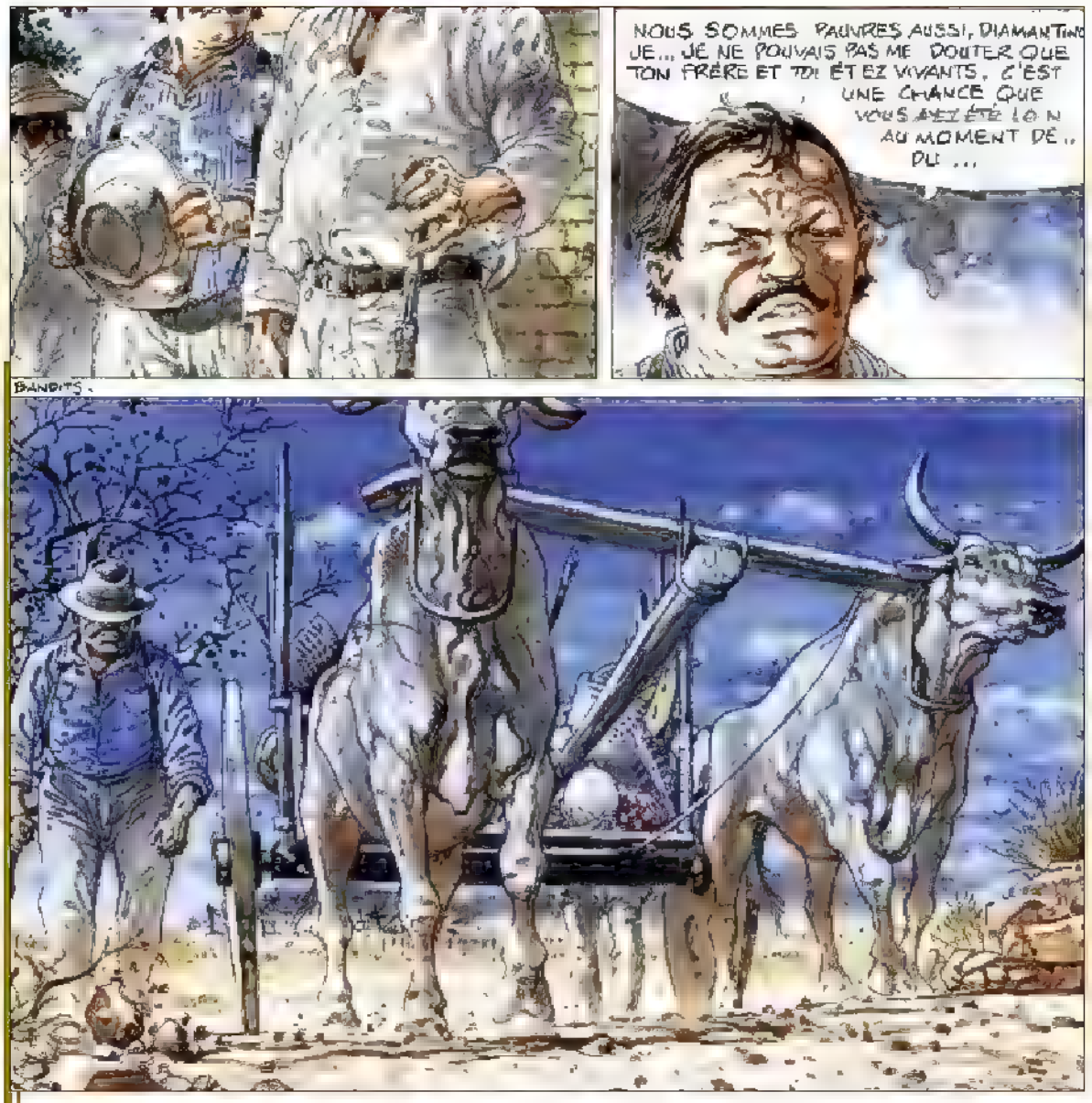
CH: You also drew *Tintin*'s first serial of *Jugurtha*, based on the Ancient Libyan King's uprising against the Roman Empire.
HH: I did *Jugurtha* because Greg didn't have time to provide sufficient scripts to feed me. Jean Luc Vernal's script was really bad he twisted history and made some very Leftist changes, turning these North Africans fighting against the Romans into some kind of Vietnamese fighting the Americans. Vernal described Jugurtha as if he was killing people by accident – there were a lot of accidents in his life!



Right: Hermann's first one shot, published in 1991, was *Missie Vandisandi*, which dealt among many other themes with French colonialism in Africa

CH: Whatever the setting or period, you always put a lot of the natural world into your comics works.
HH: Yes, I grew up in the countryside in a small village, 15 houses at most, surrounded by woods. To me, the woods are very important. I live in nature now. When I walk in the woods, I look at the trees, at the way they are made that's why some people say I am the closest to nature among Belgian comics draughtsmen. I live in Brussels but I'm not a real city guy. I like nature. And I have a house in the south of France. I spend two months every summer there, surrounded by sheep and cows. I have a swimming pool there, which a cow fell into recently. Fortunately, she was very sporty and managed to jump out!

CH: Greg became editor of *Tintin* in 1966 and *Bernard Prince* was part of his modernisation plans. How did Hergé react?
HH: Hergé was mostly in control but he was no dictator he accepted these changes very fast, because he's intelligent, he knew everything evolves. Some people complained that my type of drawing was bringing violence into the magazine and some of the staff felt the same way. But under ☛


NOUS SOMMES PAUVRES AUSSI, DIAMANTINO JE... JE NE POUVAIS PAS ME DOUTER QUE TON FRÈRE ET TOI ÉTIEZ VIVANTS. C'EST UNE CHANCE QUE VOUS AYEZ ÉTÉ LÀ N AU MOMENT DÉ.. DU ...
BANDITS.

ÉPATANT, DOCTEUR, VOTRE SYSTÈME.. ON VOIT QUE VOUS AVEZ UNE LONGUE EXPÉRIENCE DE NOS PETITS MALHEURS, À NOUS AUTRES PAUVRES ERRANTS DE L'OUEST SAUVAGE ...
VA VOUS AURA PRÉVENU, WETCHIN' DANS VOTRE ÉTAT C'EST IDIOT DE VOULOIR REPRENDRE LA PISTE SI TÔT CE PLÂTRE N'EST MÊME PAS SEC !...

Greg, sales went up again, and when money comes in, the boss, Raymond Leblanc, didn't care about the rest!

CH: In 1972, you and Greg switched genres to start the Western drama *Comanche*, adding a grittier edge to the weekly.

HH: Yes, especially in the climax of the fourth story, where the cowboy Red Dust was not supposed to shoot the killer, only arrest him. But I said to Greg that he is such a horrible man, I insisted that Red Dust kill him, on garbage cans in the back streets. So he did. It was a sign that times were changing. But in the next episode, Greg decided we must show Red Dust coming out of jail. I didn't like the idea that he was punished. It's hypocrisy, it wasn't like that in the Wild West. People were killing for much less than that. I like to stick to reality, no illusions, not trying to show mankind as something fantastic. I don't want to be dishonest, but if I'm rough, I'm rough.

CH: How did your artwork develop during this period?

HH: I moved away from the brush to the finer lines of the Rotring pen. I did my own colouring at first but later I was looking for a colourist for *Bernard Prince* and *Comanche*, because I needed time for my new solo project, *Jeremiah*. So my artist friend Dany introduced me to his colourist, Fraymond, alias Raymond Fernandez. A sort of osmosis soon formed between us, so when I drew, I kept in mind how he would colour and eliminated all unnecessary effects.

CH: *Jeremiah* in 1979 marked your daring departure from two hit series in Belgium to pursue writing and drawing your own, a transition from draughtsman to complete auteur.

Above left: *Caatinga*, Hermann's graphic novel set in 1930s Brazil, displayed a strikingly distinctive colour palette

Above right: Even in the company of great European Westerns, *Comanche* stands out as a masterpiece

HH: Yes, it was total freedom! I left Greg, I fell out of love with him! Because he once told me, when I was writing some short comics for myself, "For a draughtsman they're very good, but you'll never be a scriptwriter." It's up to me to discover what I can do! So I took up a good deal with a German magazine to create my own series. And some years later, I heard that Greg told someone, "I think he became a scriptwriter too!"

What put me on the track towards *Jeremiah* was reading a science fiction novel called *Ravage* written in 1943 by René Barjavel, about a dystopian near future after a nuclear war. *Jeremiah* has touches of the Western, as it's set in an America torn apart after racial wars. I didn't want to stick to one location, so Jeremiah and his friend Kurdy are always on the move; it's a sort of post apocalyptic road movie. Their quest is eternal and never completed. It's the same for you and me. But the journey

Above left: *Sarajevo Tango* is Hermann's painted 1995 graphic novel about the siege of Sarajevo

Above right: "The Cage" was among the first of Hermann's works to appear in English, in an album published by Catalan Communications. Others appeared in *Heavy Metal*

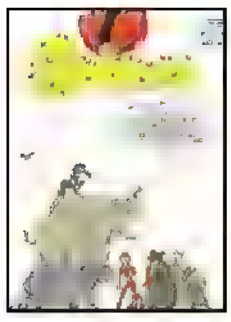
can be good. My next *Jeremiah*, the 34th, will be a flashback to Kurdy a few years before he met Jeremiah. As for the 2002 4 American TV adaptation, I had no approval, they just paid me some money. They made it politically correct, about two guys saving the world with the American flag. Forget it – just flush the toilet!

CH: How did your ten-volume medieval series, *Towers of Bois-Maury*, come about?

HH: By pure chance. I made one 23 page story but had no publisher. My friend Ervin Rustemagic in Sarajevo told me to make another story to have enough for an album. He became my agent for it and sold it to Glénat, who specialise in historical comics. Hal Foster's *Prince Valiant* never influenced me – his figures were too stiff, like statues. I don't show the life of somebody important, it's about a more ordinary person. Some medieval specialists told me my comic came closest to their understanding of the harshness, the absence of comfort, of the Middle Ages.

CH: Ervin sent you faxes with real news about the Bosnian War, which inspired the first of many one-shot albums in 1995, *Sarajevo Tango*, and your first in watercolours.

HH: Yes, English Daler Rowney and Winsor & Newton are the best, you know. I'd been to Sarajevo several times and knew the city. I was deeply touched by the bombing of Markale market. I had to do a book about it. I accused the United Nations and President Mitterrand of not doing enough. Some critics complained I am not a journalist. So do I have no right to express my anger? There are no lies in my book. I just show what happened.

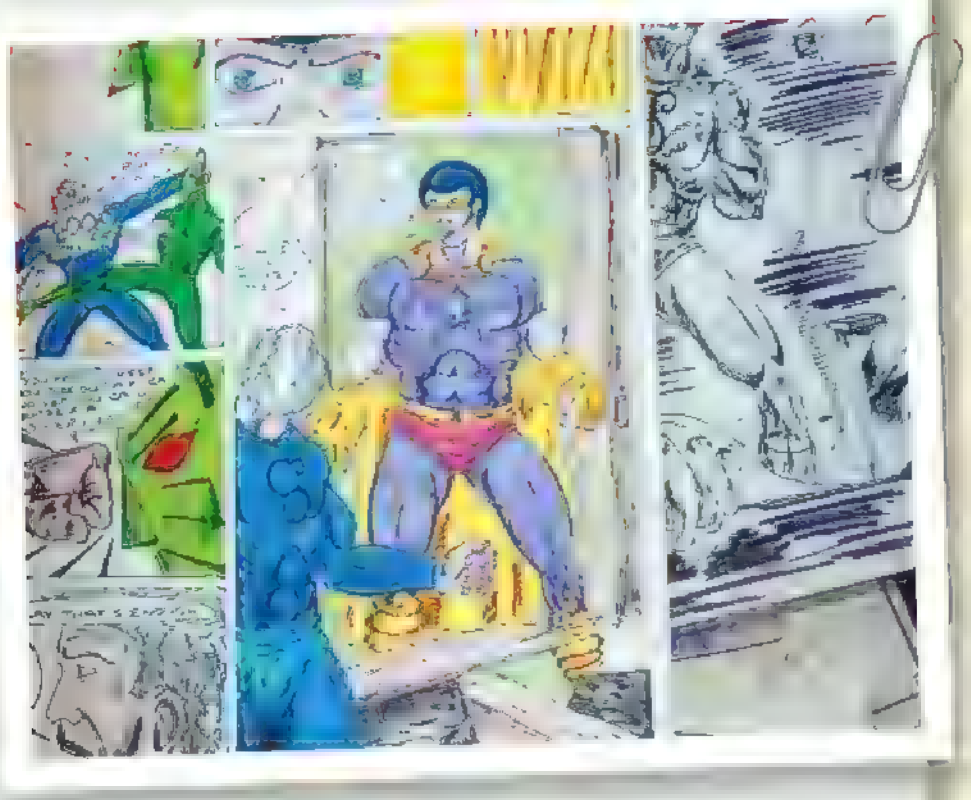


CH: What's it like having your son Yves as your scriptwriter on many of your one-shots, like *Blood Ties* and *Trilogy USA*, translated by Dark Horse?

HH: The relationship is really good. We talk and when there is a problem, we fix it together. I'm lucky, because my series never sold 100,000 copies, I was never trapped having to produce only a hit series. My public follows whatever I do, and I never cheat, I always pull out the best in me. I am my own boss and I follow my own feelings. I try to remain natural. Storytelling, that's my life. CH

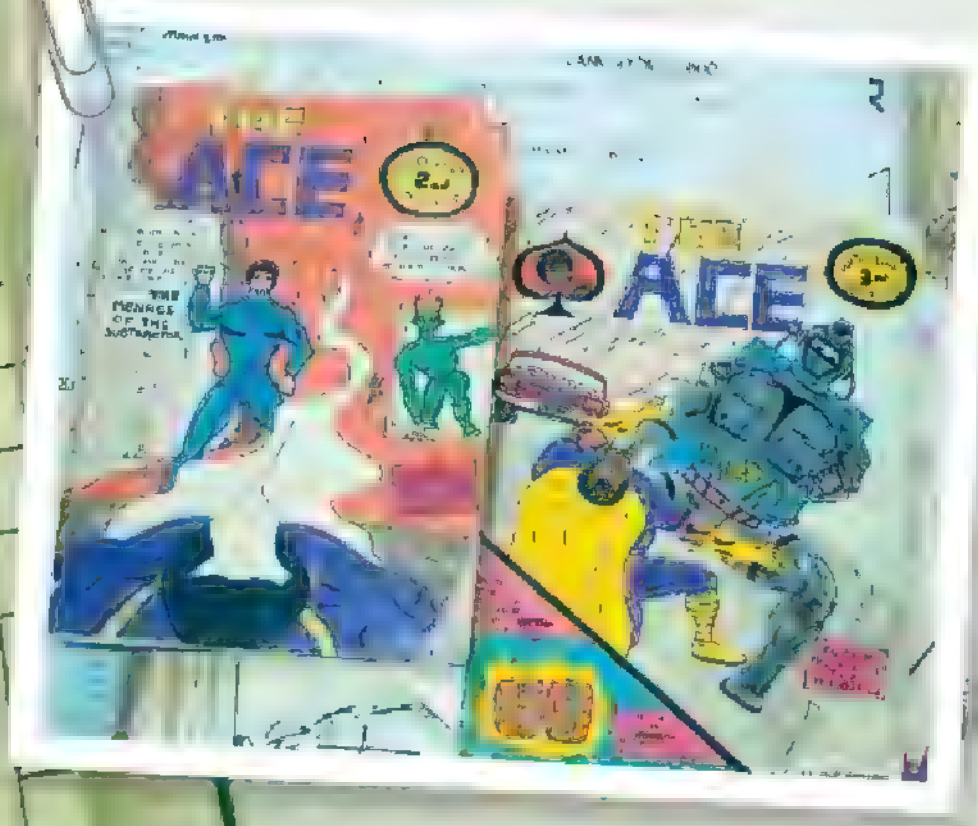
TRUE BELIEVER!

GRAHAM KIBBLE-WHITE TELLS THE AMAZING TALE OF THE MIDLANDS MAN WHO TRIED TO LAUNCH HIS OWN MARVEL-STYLE COMICS LINE...



Dear Reader,

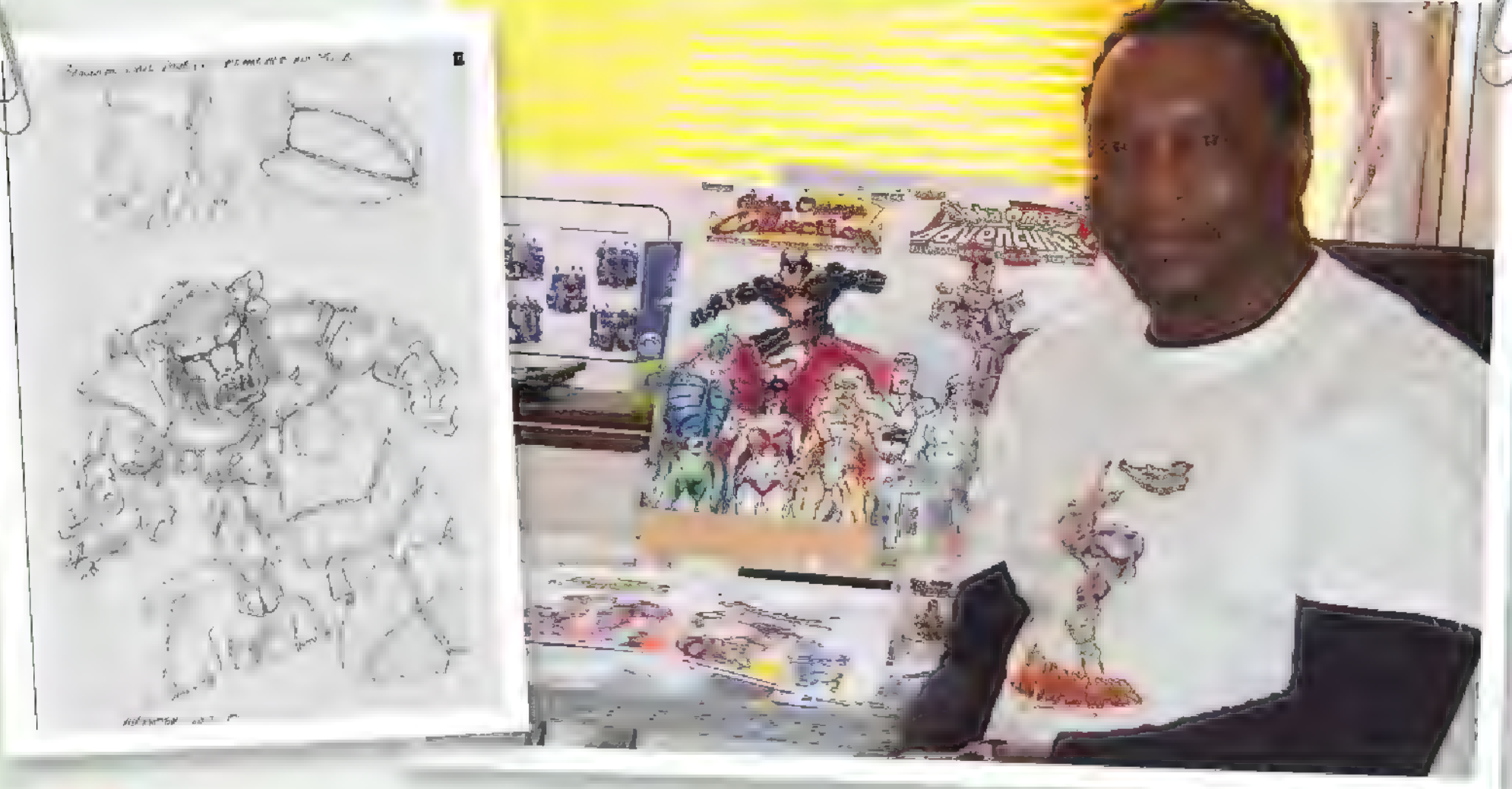
It began in 1988 when Alpha Omega Collection appeared on the shelves of a handful of comic shops around the UK. Within its colour covers were 52 black-and-white pages detailing the tales of "A new range of heroes from and in Britain!!" They included the savage Wolf, super teams the Britonian Guard (Highlands Man, Golden Lion and Dragona) and the PACT (including Detra the Destroyer, Combat Man and Spyglass) plus the intergalactic agent the Ace, sent to Birmingham to find a demi-goddess.



That debut was followed by two more issues in 1989 and 1990, which continued to chart the fates of these idiosyncratic crusaders – and deliver excellently hyperbolic editorials from Alpha Omega himself.

But just who was Alpha Omega? How did his charmingly parochial creation end up being distributed across America? And what happened after 1990?

Now read on!



In truth, this is a story of one man's resilience. His name – as unlikely as it might sound – is really Alf Omega Potter, and he was the Alpha Omega Collection. *Comic Heroes* tracked down the now 52 year old Potter to his home in Wolverhampton, where we spoke to him in his office cum art studio, among archive boxes containing almost everything he's committed to paper.

It was at junior school that he developed a passion for comics. "The first one I saw was *The Incredible Hulk*, and all these monsters were ganging up on him. That's what got me hooked," says Potter. When a school friend began drawing his own stories, Potter followed suit, creating *Alf Potter Presents Marvel Super Hero Challengaes* [sic] *in Colour* ("My spelling was never brilliant"), which featured matchstick men versions of Spider Man, Daredevil et al. The back page contains a statement of intent, as portentous as anything Peter Parker ever vowed: "I, Alf Potter... started this comic on 21st of October 1978... I hope to do another one soon."

"I was 13 years old," says Potter. "I made a series of 50 comics using Marvel superheroes." But then he decided to move into the "creator owned" market. "It was the summer holidays and I took some paper home from school. I thought, 'If I'm going to make my own superhero, who would I want to see?'" He realised that person would be himself. "I'm black Caribbean, and there weren't many characters like that, so I created the Ace."

ONWARD AND UPWARD

This was just the start. Potter digs out another document. It's dated 17th October, 1979, and it's from a careers adviser: "Alf has applied some thought to his future... but we have highlighted a number of problems," it reads. "Both the careers (cartoonist/actor) which Alf has thought about require a great deal of ability and are very competitive... You must think about this, Alf, and discuss it with Mum."

Above: Alf Potter with some of his work, including (above left) a more recent page of the adventures of the Britonian Guard

Potter left school in 1980, committed to making it in comics. He took courses in photography and art, and enrolled on a Youth Training Scheme to learn printing. He also sought the counsel of Mike Higgs, a Birmingham artist who'd worked for titles such as *Pow!* and *Whizzer & Chips*. "I saw him quite a bit, showed him my work. He gave me advice about doing black and white stuff – to add more detail to it."

Potter's intent was to create a comics line devoted to his own superheroes. "There was nothing around in that vein. We only had *2000 AD* and all their stuff was set in the future. I wanted to do it in the here and now. And I wanted diverse characters."

In fact, his submissions had been rejected by *2000 AD* and several other publishers. "Nobody was interested in my ideas and they didn't think my artwork was up to scratch. But I wasn't going to let anything deter me."

During this period, Potter says, he was "mainly on the dole." But >

there was a proliferation of training courses. Another was a 10 week business development scheme run by the Prince's Trust. From that, he secured a £500 grant to create a product – the 52 page introductory *Alpha Omega Collection*, released in August 1988.

"It was an experiment," Potter says. "I'd got chatty with the guy at the Nostalgia and Comics shop in Birmingham and he gave me an industry publication with lists of all the speciality comic retailers in the UK. I contacted them – 'Would you take a copy of my book?' – just to see if people were interested. Some took it, some didn't."

The first print run was a couple of hundred. "That was done at a shop I found in Birmingham. They did the whole thing for me. They were a bit concerned, because when they added up the cost and saw how much I was selling it for [90p], they said, 'You're not going to make any money.' I had to tell them, 'It's not about making money – it's about seeing if people are interested'."

Enough were. "I got about 150 out there and sold 75 80 issues. That was a good sign."

In the editorial from that issue, Potter was careful not to refer to himself in the singular. The Alpha Omega Collection was something nebulous, akin to the Marvel Bullpen. He was also presenting a range of stories with a plethora of characters – a fully formed "universe". "That was my intention. I sort of did parodies of Marvel superheroes... Well, inspired by them. The plan was to try and build something whereby I could then bring in a lot of my friends who were artists. That was the dream."

THIS WAS THE BATTLE I WAS TRYING TO AVOID. IT WAS HIS RAGE AGAINST MY FURY.
HIS HOUND SENSED, ANTICIPATED MY NEXT MOVE...
.. MY WOLF ANTICIPATED HIS NEXT MOVE.
EVENTUALLY ONE OF US HAD TO CONNECT.
I WAS DETERMINED IT WOULD BE ME!

Above: Alf's aim has always been to recreate some of the excitement and spirit of Marvel superhero comics but with a British context

LOCAL HEROES

Potter's creation also deviated from the US paradigm in that this was a resolutely British endeavour. In fact, resolutely Midlands.

"Everyone keeps going on about London – but that's not where I live. I had one of my characters, the Wolf, in Wolverhampton. Obviously, Wolf, Wolverhampton – that works. The Ace, I based in Birmingham. Then I had another group called the PACT and I was going to push them more towards Stafford."

Bolstered by the indication that there was a market, Potter pushed on with the "official" first issue of *Alpha Omega Collection* and a print run of 5,000. But there was a problem. Having completed the production of his cover, the printers quoted a vastly increased fee for the interior. "I only had

"EVERYONE KEEPS GOING ON ABOUT LONDON, BUT THAT'S NOT WHERE I LIVE..."

about three grand," he remembers. "I had some money from the Prince's Trust and an overdraft – I just could not afford to do it." He rang around local businesses, and one Wolverhampton based magazine put him on to their printers in Welshpool. "The price they gave me was brilliant," he says, plus they agreed to take the extant covers and assemble them with the inside pages.

With a Stan Lee instinct for showmanship, Potter made sport of his difficulties in his "Important Foreword" when the comic came out: "Dear Reader, we almost didn't make it!!!?"

Running to 48 pages, the issue continued the story of the Britonian Guard, who fought the Germanic Master Race, and ran a lengthy origin piece for the Wolf.

But getting it into production wasn't the only challenge. "I was told I needed to find distributors, so I went to the library and I got this book – BRAD [The British Rates And Data directory], which listed companies. I took names from there, and began to send out copies of my comic. WHSmith looked at it and said no, because of my terrible spelling. But I found some independents who took it on, plus the Express & Star in Wolverhampton."

As a result, his second issue did make it into a disparate selection of shops. "It ended up in Fife in Scotland, and some issues even made it to Malta."

GETTING IT OUT THERE

It wasn't enough. "I then found five distributors in America and I wrote to them, enclosing a poster and one of my comic books. Two of them responded. Actually, one of them was from Canada, and they said, 'Send us 25 books and we'll see if we can do anything'. Sent the books, never heard from them again. But the other? My mouth hit the floor, because it was an order for 384 issues – which they wanted within the month."

This was Wisconsin based Capital City Distribution. Potter managed to fulfil the order, and *Alpha Omega Collection* – with its Staffordshire heroes – was now available in the US. Plus, Capital paid him promptly.

Above: One of Alf's character designs.

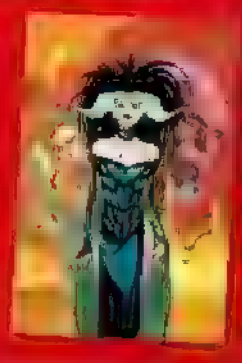
At home, that wasn't the case. Being a one man band with no clout, Potter found it impossible to get timely payment from British >

WORLD BUILDER

In 2004, author Mark Millar launched his own comics line, Millarworld. What advice does he have for Alf Potter?

Why did you launch Millarworld?

I was interviewing Stan Lee for *SFX* magazine, and I was being cocky. I said, "Yeah, Stan, I do a lot of the big Marvel books." He replied, "Yeah, that's great, kid – but why don't you write your own stuff?" I hadn't even considered that. It was a light bulb moment.



In the case of Alf Potter, he returned to the comics market in 2013 via e-books. Is that the best way to do it?

I think he's doing the right thing. Get it out digitally, but with a view to doing it in print later, because the digital market has been massively over-played. It's not as big as people think, but I'm glad it exists. I know a lot of guys like Alf who got stung in the 1980s when they were having to put up their own money. Online is a good way to get it out there initially.

You've taken a look at some of Alf Potter's work.

The thing I love about it is the level of detail. This is a guy who has a plan and he's seen it through. There are so many talented people I've met over the years who only get to page four of their comic. All credit to him. The idea of just doing it and risking his own cash and getting it out there, I admire that.

Alf is now in his 50s – is that going to be a disadvantage?

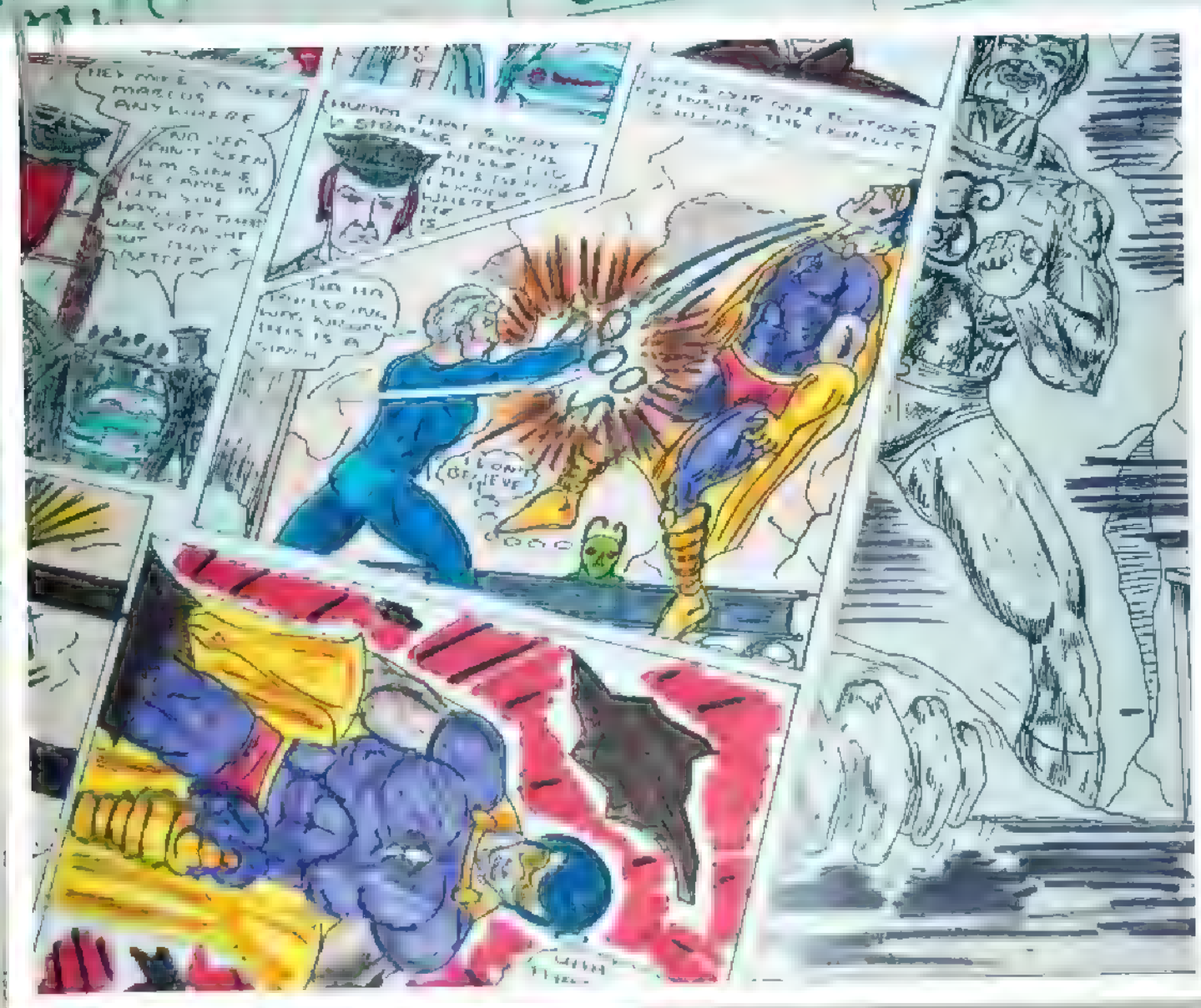
Not at all. The beautiful thing about this job is you can get as old and fat as you like, and nobody notices because Spider-Man is always going to be in great condition. I've sat in publishing meetings, I've sat in Hollywood meetings – I've never once heard someone say, "I don't like this idea, the guy's too old." Everything is based on its own merit. Alvin Sargent was about 78 when he wrote the script for *Spider-Man 2* and it's the best of those films by a mile.

After all these years, Alf Potter's still working on characters he created at 14. Is that unusual?

To me, that's the sign he's on to something – and I'll tell you why. When Image Comics launched, every one of those creations – Spawn, Savage Dragon – were things those guys had first drawn in their childhood notebooks. It's weird, but I think it's as if you're tapping into something ancient within yourself. There's an authenticity to it.

Finally, what's your advice for Alf?

I hate to sound like a fortune cookie, but there's this amazing quote I heard, which is so brutal, but it's true: People who tell you to give up on your dreams have given up on theirs. I'd tell him to always keep going.



distributors. Worse, many of them vowed not to work with him again, aggrieved at being "hounded" for money. Cash flow delayed production on the third issue...

In the meantime, fan mail began to trickle in. Looking at some of those letters today, it's apparent there was a global army of would be Alpha Omegas who wanted to join the campaign.

One letter came from a pair of Merseyside students, offering Potter use of their "three uncopyrighted heroes" in the hope that he'd go on to license from their 600-plus stock of "copyrighted creations... Heroes and villains [who come] complete with statistics... and background information."

Another wrote from Solihull, mentioning he'd also been on employment training schemes, and offering, "If you ever need any help drawing or inking... I'd be more than willing".

To Potter's credit, it was a correspondence from Long Beach, California, that made the most impact. Complimentary of his endeavours, it also read: "If you don't mind a little criticism, you should pick up a book on the human body... [Plus] you're putting too much detail into your art and the focus is being lost."

"At first, I was shocked," says Potter. "But, constructive criticism is the best thing you can have. That letter helped me improve. I was just concentrating on getting my comic out the door. That made me step back and look at it."

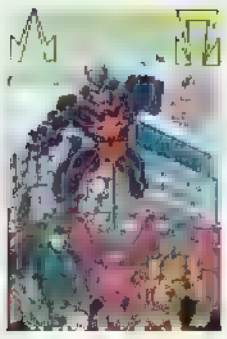
A year passed and even though the next *Alpha Omega Collection* had been completed, there wasn't the money to take it to production. Potter had lost momentum and when he finally could progress, Capital City reduced their order to 180. This was a blow, as, following his UK experience, he was looking to concentrate on the US market.

"Dear Reader, we almost didn't make it again!" ran the foreword in the third issue, cover dated 1990 and sporting USA and CAN price variants. Potter went on to reveal that aside from problems with distributors, printing costs had increased once more, forcing him to undertake most of the work himself. The issue featured a reprinting of the Wolf story from the introductory comic, plus continuing adventures of the Britonian Guard and the Ace.

It was to be the last *Alpha Omega Collection* for 23 years.

Above: The Ace faces the menace of the sinister Subtractor in one of Alf's early comics

Below left: A development drawing for The Wolf, "a hero for Wolverhampton"



FACING THE FUTURE

"It wasn't a quick realisation that it was all over," reflects Potter, who, as ever, was already working on the next issue. "I revamped the comic book. I cleaned it up. The artwork was better; the storylines were better. I was proud of what I was doing.

"I even sent some of it to Capital City, saying, 'This is what's next'. But I just couldn't raise the money." In the early 1990s, the UK economy was in recession. Despite revising his business plan, Potter could no longer find funding.

Eventually, he walked away from his creations. "I went into the motor industry," he reveals. However, he severely injured his back at work, precipitating a general decline in his health. "I got diabetes all sorts happened. I'm now basically disabled."

Potter says it's been impossible to find employment since. "But I needed to do something. It was

staring me in the face: return to the comic book."

February, 2013. "Dear Reader, I dared to dream..." He was back. Potter released two full colour 52 page comics simultaneously on the Amazon Kindle store: *Alpha Omega Adventures* (featuring PACT and Ace – now renamed Alphaman) and *Alpha Omega Collection* (Wolf and the Britorian Guard, formerly Britonian). In the new world of e publishing, printing and distribution were no longer barriers – although Potter did aspire to see a paper version of his comics. "I still plan to do that. But with Diamond [now the sole distributor in North America] you must have a good amount of issues ready. The plan was, start this off as a three part vehicle to reintroduce all the characters, and then follow with regular single story graphic novels."

Thus far, nothing else has been released. "I suffered an angina attack. It took me a year and a half to recover..."

But this isn't the end. For the past three years, Potter's been studying computer game design, and hopes to bring out an app featuring his characters as a way of promoting the comics. Covers for the next two issues have already been completed.

It's nearly four decades since Alf Potter dreamt up the Ace, PACT and the others. Why has he stuck with them? "Because they're mine," he says. And could his dream of creating his own kind of Marvel Universe still come to fruition? "I think it could – even though time is passing and I'm getting older. It's one of those things. The potential is there."

Above · Alf has not given up on his dream and now uses today's technology to get his work out there

Below right · Pencils featuring Alphaman, previously known as The Ace, Alf's black Caribbean defender of Birmingham

"CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM IS THE BEST THING YOU CAN HAVE. IT HELPED ME IMPROVE"

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REMEMBER: FIRST IMPRESSIONS ARE LASTING GIVE 'EM SOME ATTITUDE
YOU TWO WENT TO A LOT OF TROUBLE TO GET MY ATTENTION. YOU'VE GOT IT
OKAY WE'LL WORK ON IT
AH! THE GUEST OF HONOR!
BEGGARS CAN'T BE CHOOSERS
AFTER YOU
MUM SMALLER THAN I'D PICTURED HIM.
YOU'RE TOO KIND
HE SEEMS RELUCTANT PERHAPS WE CAN LIGHT A FIRE UNDER HIM
NO PLEASE!
NOTHING PERSONAL. YOU UNDERSTAND
WELL, MAYBE A BIT
HEY! HEY! DON'T-
DAMMITALL KID! ARE YOU WAITING FOR AN INVITATION? GET THEM
THWAK

DC Rebirth round-up

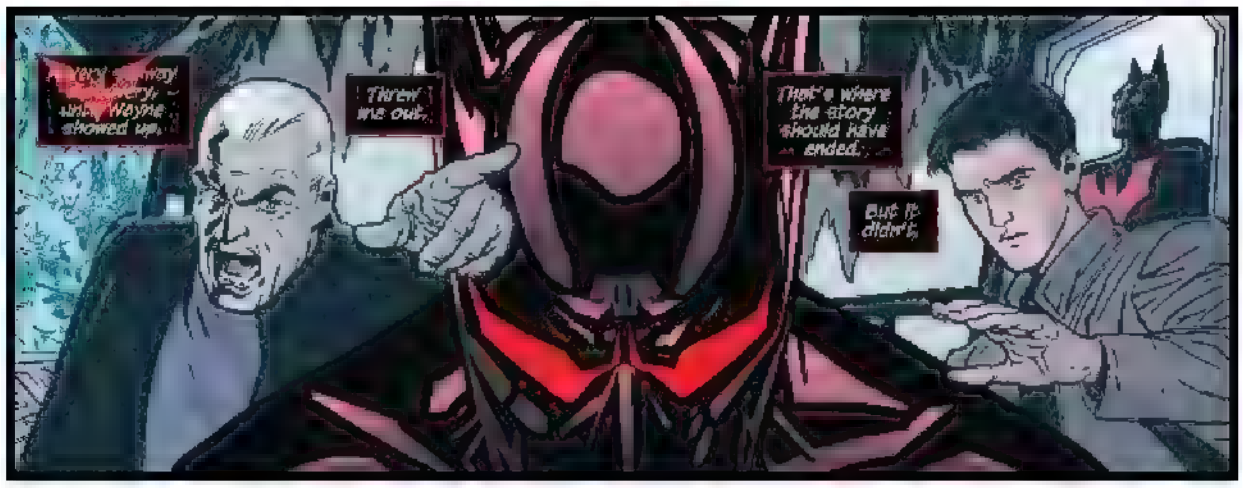
DC's Rebirth project is so good, even the second-tier characters' titles are must-buys. They might not lead current movie franchises, but it's surely only a matter of time.

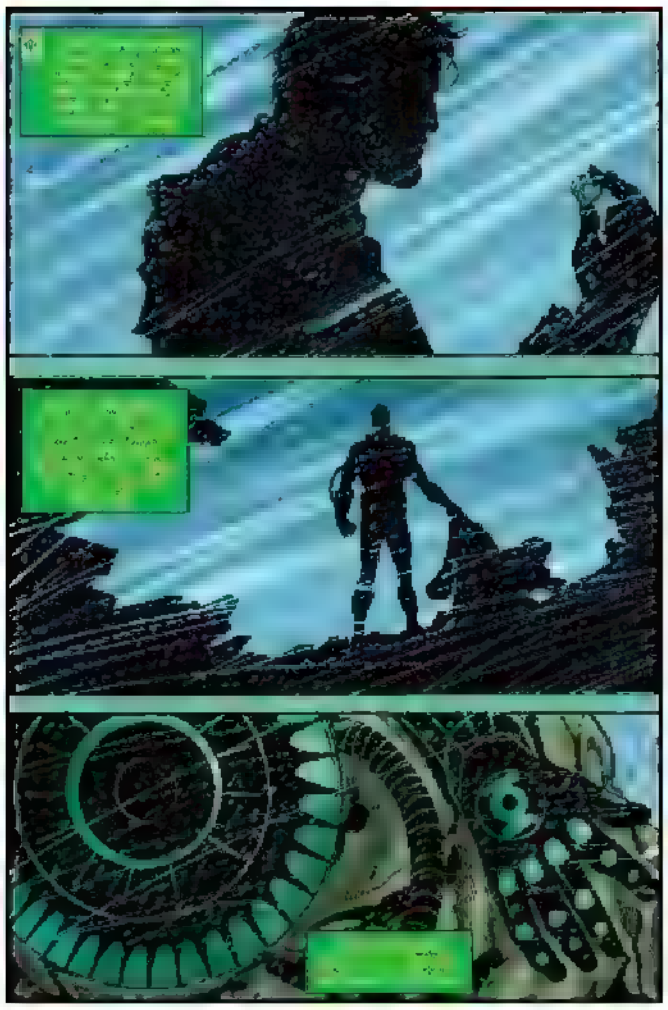
One supporting hero currently scheduled for a movie will need to do better than last time. Let's face it, Green Lantern is hardly anyone's favourite DC star. Don't get us wrong, the GL titles contain an extraordinarily complex universe – which, ironically, might be the reason no one's created an iconic cinematic adaptation of the character yet; it's ridiculously tricky to get right. But any future screenwriters would be wise to pick up and study *Hal Jordan and the Green Lantern Corps*, which suggests the character may be best served on TV. One issue of "Sinestro's Law" contains more plot twists and reveals than a full season of *Game of Thrones*. The arc uses truly beautiful and imaginative art, making full use of the concept of an interstellar law agency made up of a wide variety of alien species (a three faced creature is probably our favourite) to drive a compelling story tracking an initially lone Lantern's (Hal Jordan's) attempts to fight Sinestro's fear powers, before backup arrives... This is an essential book, as good as anything involving DC's main trinity, with action that couldn't possibly be contained in even a four hour film.

Speaking of the trinity and characters that deserve a TV series spin-off, we'd kill to see Batman's pal Nightwing get his own show. Surely the most underrated hero in the DC canon, Nightwing is basically what would happen if Spider Man grew up to be Batman; he's Bruce Wayne with a friendly grin and a joyous sense of humour. After not quite knowing what to do with him stripping him of his suit and turning him into a spy for the short lived *Grayson* series DC Rebirth has put Dick back where he belongs, in a Nightwing costume, kicking ass on the streets of Gotham. "Better Than Batman" sees him ostensibly forced to work for The Court of Owls, who are unaware he has the upper hand. But when they pair him with new sidekick Raptor, all hell breaks loose. A delicate incorporation of Dick's circus history including some gorgeous metaphors makes this an intelligent read; coupled with cool art and smart wit, it's an entertaining one too.

Supergirl has fared better in the adaptation stakes, with a cult '80s flick and a hugely popular TV show still airing. Which might explain why her book is flying off the shelves; it certainly isn't the quality of the product. "Reign Of The Cyborg Superman" combines sketchy, spiky art, an annoying narrative structure and a fundamental misconception of the character (who wants to see a superhero who's terrible at heroism?) for diminishing returns. Pacing

> **"DC REBIRTH HAS PUT DICK GRAYSON BACK WHERE HE BELONGS"**

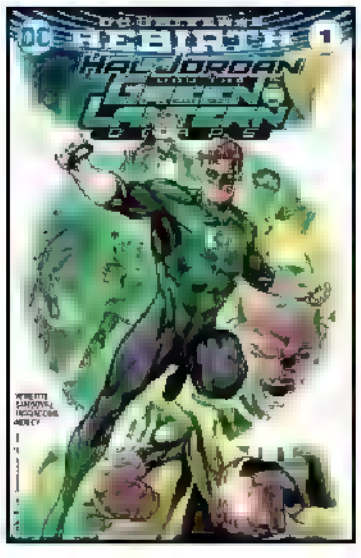




problems create connection issues, cutting too quickly to (attempts at) epic battles before we've had a chance to warm to this incarnation of Kara. The story sees our heroine facing a cyborg Superman who thinks he's her dad, and every page turn feels like going through the forced motions of a robot malfunctioning – thematically appropriate, but not much fun.

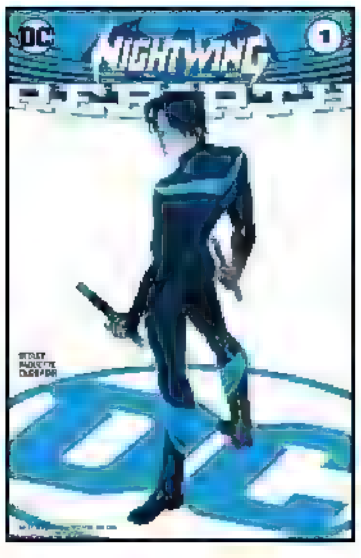
Batman Beyond, conversely, started as a cartoon, imagining a brand new Batman of the future (complete with a high tech suit and a teen hero, Terry McGinnis, wearing it), with the comic itself the adaptation. It's a subtle difference, but an important one. Over the course of its run, *Beyond* has grown with its audience, with its earliest incarnations aimed at younger readers and this latest (and potentially best) reboot targeting older collectors, with higher levels of violence, intensity and stakes. Fast paced opener 'Escaping The Grave" sees Terry filling new readers in on his backstory whilst facing off against a criminal army influenced by memories of the Joker. But, as a brilliant issue one cliffhanger reveals, memories might not be the only thing driving their crimes... *Beyond* is worth picking up not just for the story alone: this is a good looking book, with animation influenced art incorporating lots of movement and dynamic poses. The design variation within the Joker gang is especially enjoyable – see if you can spot the Jared Leto reference in there.

If *Batman Beyond* seems to be reaching its peak, *Blue Beetle* is still on the journey. The two titles are connected in a way by a premise (veteran hero advising protégé via an earpiece), if not a legacy (Blue Beetle is no Batman), but, after a Rebirth issue full of potential, the main book is a step down in quality. "Deja Blue" contains the same sense of humour, but continuity concerns and weak supporting characters stop it from being truly great. Still, we're only three issues in, and with each instalment's standards increasing, we may well see a big screen Blue Beetle yet. **Sam Ashurst**



Writer: Robert Venditti
Artists: Rafa Sandoval, Jordi Tarragona
Colourist: Tomeu Morey
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: #1–7

★★★★



Writer: Tim Seeley
Artist: Javier Fernandez
Colourist: Chris Sotomayor
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: #1–3

★★★★

Writer: Steve Orlando
Artist: Brian Ching
Colourist: Mike Atiyeh
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: #1–3

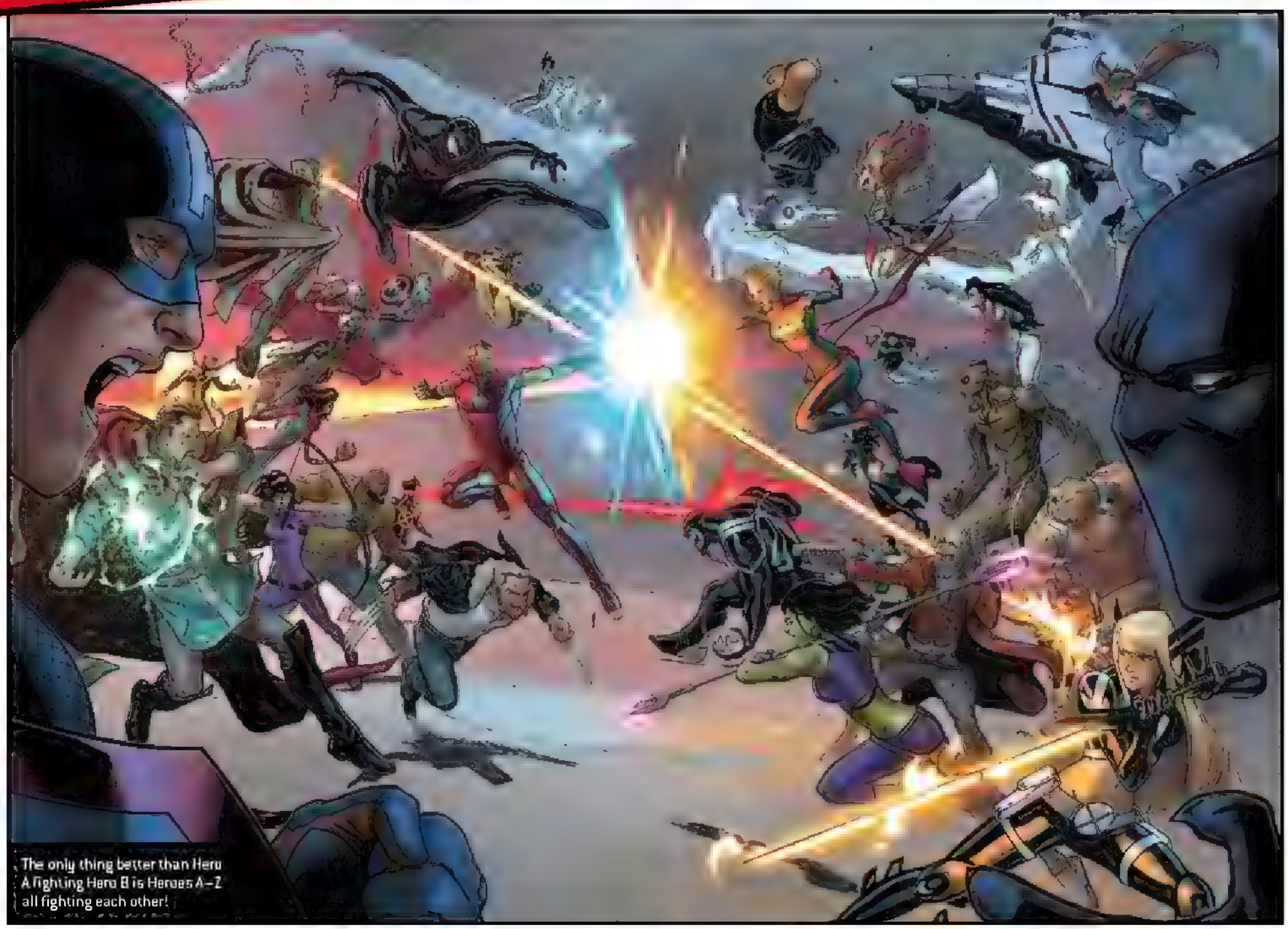
★★

Writer: Dan Jurgens
Artist: Bernard Chang
Colourist: Marcelo Maiolo
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: #1–2

★★★★

Writers: Keith Giffen, Scott Kolins
Artist: Scott Kolins
Colourist: Romulo Fajardo Jr
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: #1–3

★★★


The only thing better than Hero A fighting Hero B is Heroes A–Z all fighting each other!

Marvel round-up

Perhaps the most maddening thing in comic books is missed potential. What could have been. How worlds could have had a completely different make up, had someone decided to walk a different path. If only a hero wasn't forced to choose between doing what's right and what makes them feel good. If only a supervillain decided to down tools and contribute to the greater good of society.

And if only Marvel could stop manufacturing wide scale superhero vs. superhero barneys only to disappoint readers with an unsatisfying endgame.

Civil War II was a book of supreme potential. Brian Michael Bendis is one of Marvel's most capable writers. David Marquez is a comic book star artist of the future. The idea of Earth 616 clashing over an Inhuman who can predict the future is an intriguing one... But instead, with one issue left, all we have left is... potential. As it stands now, *Civil War II* can join *AXIS*, *Age of Ultron* and *Fear Itself* in the Marvel pantheon of dud event books. Too many heroes. Too many big ideas executed poorly. Too many double page spread fights that bring about too many senseless deaths.

Following the excellent Secret Wars event, the Marvel Universe deserved a better crossover event to bring all of our heroes back together. *Civil War II*, despite Marquez's excellent artwork and one (semi promising) flash forward, falls some way short. Readers can only hope that the delayed conclusion can bring some sort of satisfying denouement.

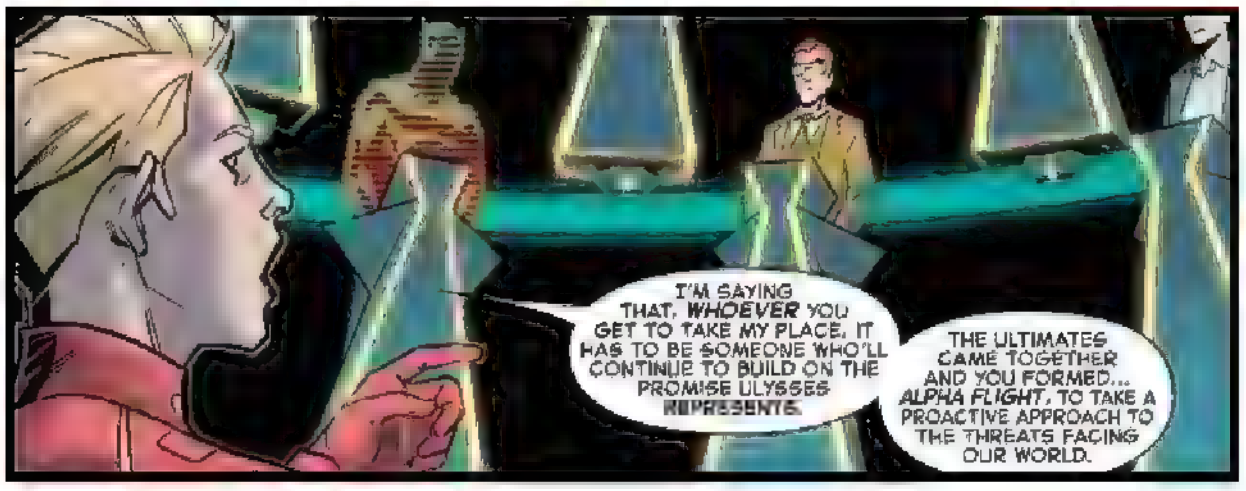
"TOO MANY HEROES. TOO MANY BIG IDEAS EXECUTED POORLY"

A true Marvel

It's a shame, because in Captain Marvel's main book we can look at what Carol Danvers, and the wider Civil War II conflict, are meant to be. Far from the uncompromising zealot and warhawk we see in the main CWII story, Carol's solo adventures show a hero in the throes of grief, struggling to protect the planet from wave after wave of escalating threats. What is Brian Michael Bendis' loss on the main books has proven to be Ruth and Christos Gage's gain on this run. Once again it has taken an event tie in book to make the massive event seem relatable.

While Civil War II is yet to finish, its ramifications are already being dealt with. The event will have "dire consequences for Tony Stark". So much so, that in his absence Victor Von Doom has taken up the armoured mantle in the new *Infamous Iron Man* book. It's certainly an intriguing high concept idea, and while Bendis' opening two issues are brief, there's enough spark in Von Doom's early attempts at playing straight to hold interest. Tony Stark can enjoy his holiday. Victor and Riri have it covered.

In a novel twist for a Marvel crossover event, Peter Parker is surprisingly quiet. Reason

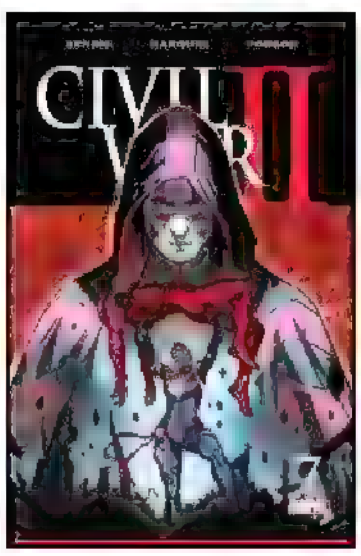

I'M SAYING THAT, WHOEVER YOU GET TO TAKE MY PLACE, IT HAS TO BE SOMEONE WHO'LL CONTINUE TO BUILD ON THE PROMISE ULYSSES REPRESENTS.
THE ULTIMATES CAME TOGETHER AND YOU FORMED... ALPHA FLIGHT, TO TAKE A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO THE THREATS FACING OUR WORLD.

being? He's got his own big event to deal with in the (mouthily titled) event Dead No More: The Clone Conspiracy. Comic readers of a certain vintage are loath to read anything involving Spider Man and clones, but in Dan Slott's continuing efforts to revise, redo and reclaim the worst of '90s Spider Man excesses, he's created a promising situation for Peter to occupy himself with. With all of his greatest allies and foes back from the dead and under the command of The Jackal, Spider Man is on the ropes, out of his depth and back being the type of bizarre sci fi romp that long term fans will love and enjoy. And that's not to mention the return of one Ms. Gwen Stacy...

Panther's pride

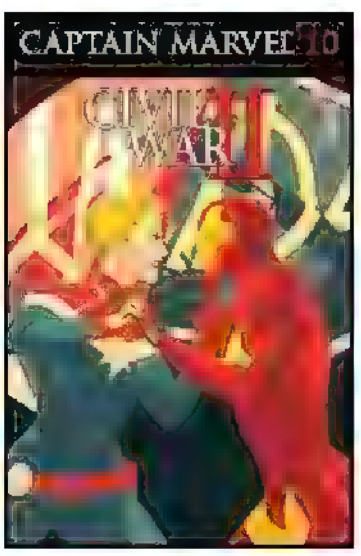
Marvel pulled off one of the writing coups of the year to get the esteemed writer and journalist Ta Nehisi Coates to pen the new adventures of T'Challa, and the move has come off resoundingly well. Coates' *Black Panther* puts the Afro back into "Afrofuturism". We find T'Challa in a different headspace from his usual adventures. Normally one of the most astute and formidable tacticians around, this time the Black Panther is brought low, forced to deal with the ramifications that the years of his 'pragmatic" leadership of Wakanda have sown. Coates crafts a thought provoking eight story arc (which is still to conclude) that weaves together musings on ancient African storytelling, the divine right of kings, eco terrorism and some Luke Cage themed dust ups. It's big ideas presented from one of the biggest writers in the world today to form one of the most assured Marvel debuts in years. There's even enough time to hint at a Black Panther and Storm reunion. But, once again, all that's left is potential.

Potential. That maddening term runs through all our Marvel books this time. What marvels we might have seen... potentially. **Carl Anka**



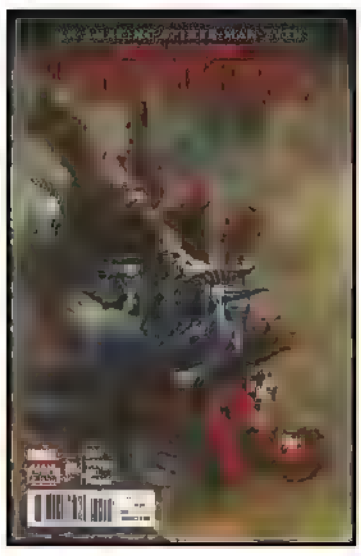
Writer: Brian Michael Bendis
Artists: David Marquez
Colourist: Justin Ponsor
Format: 8-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 3-7

★★☆☆☆



Writer: Ruth Fletcher Gage, Christos Gage
Artist: Thony Silas
Colourist: Matthew Wilson
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 6-10

★★★½☆

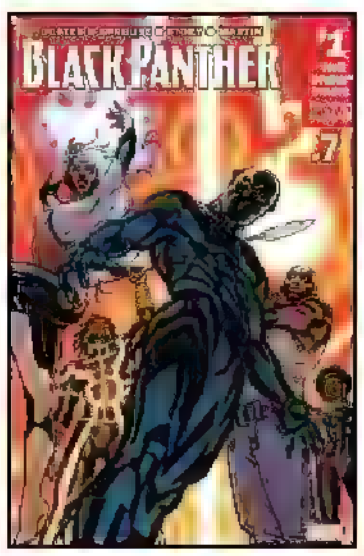


Writer: Dan Slott
Artists: Jim Cheung, John Dell
Colourist: Justin Ponsor
Format: 5-issue series
Reviewed: #1-2

★★★½☆

Writers: Brian Michael Bendis
Artist: Alex Maleev
Colourist: Matt Hollingsworth
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★☆☆



Writer: Ta-Nehisi Coates
Artists: Chris Sprouse, Karl Story
Colourist: Laura Martin
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-8

★★★★½

SOON ALEXEY WAS TRANSLATING HIS FAVORITE PUZZLES TO HIS COMPUTER.
THIS WAS ALL IN HIS SPARE TIME— THE ACADEMY OF SCIENCE HAD NO CONCERN WITH GAMES.
Tetris: a block off the old chip. (Joke © 1985.)

Tetris

Writer/Artist: Box Brown
Publisher: First Second
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★

If you grew up with videogames, there's a chance you've been addicted to *Tetris*. And 'addicted" isn't intended as cute hyperbole. This is frustration, longing, challenge and success all wrapped up in a little game about lining up multicoloured blocks.

But while *Tetris* is weirdly thrilling to play, is it really that interesting to read about? The answer is yes, because despite its titular blocky characters, this is a very human story. *Tetris* wasn't created by a gluttonous, profit hungry conglomerate but by a young Russian scientist, Alexey Pajitnov, as part of a messy, half-hearted bedroom project. It's fascinating to watch the game slowly take over the world city by city, and hilarious to see so many companies scrambling to get their hands on it.

Alongside his 2014 comic *Andre the Giant: Life and Legend*, Box Brown transcends his roots as a quirky cartoonist to emerge as a natural biographer. Each facet of the story has been meticulously researched, and Brown manages to transform a cast of boring business moguls into offbeat characters fuelled by ambition and greed. The book also feels like a retro videogame printed on paper, its simple line drawings coloured with a stark binary of black and yellow.

Brown's breezy approach to biography is also deceptively intelligent. It provides a crash course on the genesis of videogames, linking bulky arcade machines of the 1980s to cave paintings in prehistoric times, and dips into the psychology behind society's obsession with games. It's biography, cartoon and history all in one and, just like the game, will gleefully swallow up hours of your life. **Kimberley Margaux**

Black Dog

Writer/Artist: Dave McKean
Publisher: Dark Horse Comics
Format: Graphic novel

★★★★

Commissioned as part of the Imperial War Museum's 14-18 NOW arts programme to commemorate the centenary of the First World War, Dave McKean's *Black Dog: The Dreams of Paul Nash* explores the psyche of the war artist through 15 chapters, styled as dreams.

Note that 'styled as" – because this isn't a sequence of weightless fantasies. It presents snapshots of Nash's life, from childhood to his stationing on the front line at Ypres Salient, and then his decline following the war. But it also allows McKean to wend in a disturbing, off kilter element of surrealism (a Zeppelin over London is rendered as a giant fish) which, while not a pastiche of Nash's work, is redolent of it.

The approach also allows scope for McKean's diverse illustrative styles, with photographic frontispieces, some sections painted, others in ink or collage. The diversity is never jarring or attention seeking. One chapter, set in woodlands, evokes the Arts and Crafts movement, while another depicting intellectuals in conversation about art's role in tumultuous times has the faux formality of contemporary magazine illustration.

It's a bravura turn for McKean, but what ultimately impresses is what a brilliant storyteller he is. A later part of the book is laid out almost as a film strip putting the reader in the place of Nash as he's wheeled along a hospital corridor, catching glimpses of his war memories, of his late mother, and finally of the black dog that stalks him throughout. And it will stay with you a while too, even after you've put this work aside. **Graham Kibble-White**

Modern master channels WWI surrealist. Haunting.

Glitterbomb

Writer: J m Zub
Artists: D, pr Mor ssette-Phan, K. M chae Russe
Publisher: mage
Format: Ongo ng
Reviewed: ssues 1-4

★★★

***Glitterbomb* is a brutal take-down of the fame game, but with added monsters.**

Farrah is a faded actress and single mother who hasn't had a good role in years. Following a near-death experience she is possessed by an all devouring monster and sets out to get revenge on all those who wronged her.

It's a strange mix of cynical drama and creature feature, with expressive art which really comes to life when Farrah is in monster mode. Despite that, it seems less interested in the monster angle than in taking Hollywood to task for screwing over generations of young people who just want to matter in the world. Like Farrah herself, there's something bitter and resentful about the book, and while sometimes its targets deserve their comeuppance, at other times Farrah's victims are just doing their job.

It's unclear yet whether Farrah (or the monster inhabiting her) is an angel of vengeance or a villain. It's certainly hard to sympathise with her complaints about the film and TV industry as she blames everyone else for her own failures. One of Zub's key messages here seems to be that in Hollywood everyone eventually becomes what they hate and that could apply to Farrah too.

Glitterbomb is promisingly sharp tongued and cynical, but still has work to do if it's going to work out what point it's making. **Abigail Chandler**

Serenity

Writer: Chr s Roberson
Artist: Georges Jeanty
Colourist: Wes Dz oba
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: 6- ssue ser es
Reviewed: ssues 1-2

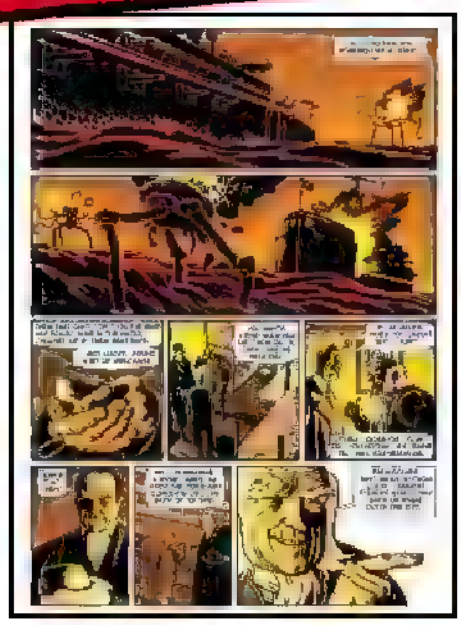
★★½

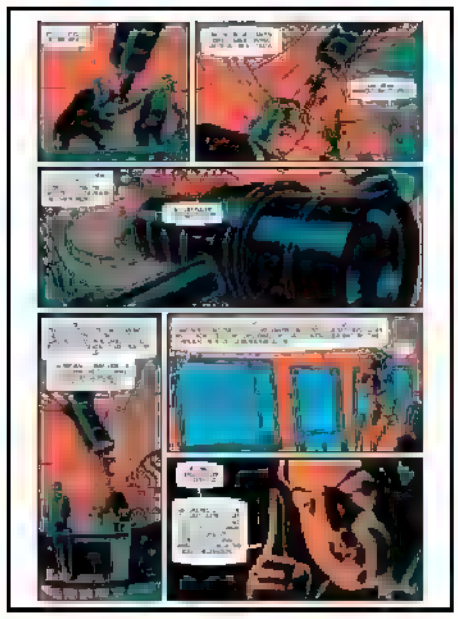
The Serenityverse is an obvious one to explore in comics, and yet Dark Horse have taken their time.

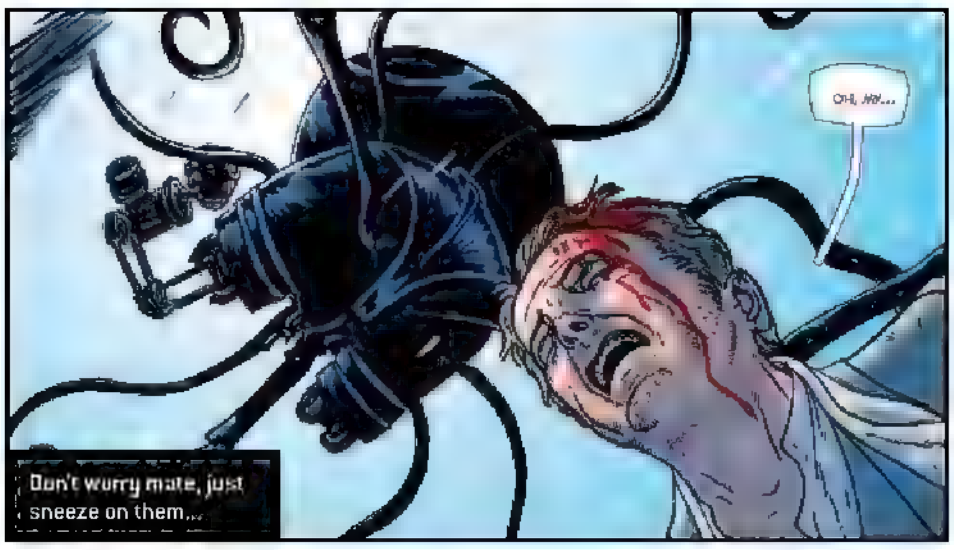
While the Buffy and Angel comics have marched ahead with numerous official "seasons", *Serenity* has been limited to the odd one shot and a handful of miniseries.

"No Power in the Verse" follows on from 2014's "Leaves on the Wind" the first arc to explore the consequences of the *Serenity* movie. But where that run moved the overall plot on, this is a rather flat continuation.

Its biggest problem is a sense of same old, same old. The crew of the Serenity are surviving via their usual means (petty crime) when they cross paths with the New Resistance, formed in the wake of the crew's revelations about the Alliance. Meanwhile, River encounters a squad of girls who endured the same torturous training as her. All potentially interesting stuff, but so far it's been blandly handled, with Jeanty's art a perfect fit for the Buffyverse not quite chiming with the grimy interiors and wide open plains of the 'verse. The script, meanwhile, lacks the warmth and insight of the best episodes of *Firefly*. That show was about the smaller character moments more than psychic assassins. There's still potential for some of that here the moral clash between Mal's support for violent resistance and the pacifist members of the crew is fertile ground, and the sort of story this series was designed to explore. But, a third of the way through, this is a drab return. **Will Salmon**







Scarlet Traces

Writer: Ian Edginton
Artist: D'Israeli
Publisher: Rebellion
Format: Trade paperback

★★★★★

***The War Of The Worlds* continues to exert a fascination and maintain relevance well over a century after its first publication.** The 2005 Spielberg/Cruise movie was a surprisingly faithful updated retelling of the tale, right down to its exquisitely bathetic dénouement, while esteemed SF author Stephen Baxter has just produced *The Massacre Of Mankind*, a sequel to the original book. Then, of course, there's the cheesily perennial Jeff Wayne album and stage musical.

For our money, though, this comics version of the material is hard to beat. Collected here in a single volume are the first two instalments of the series, beginning with an adaptation of Wells's novel. It's a masterclass in how to do this sort of thing. Ian Edginton's script preserves the flavour of the text while not getting bogged down in reproducing every single word, and the art by D'Israeli – a period appropriate pseudonym – embroiders the staid late Victorian setting with garish details and a breathtakingly lush colour palette.

Better still is the sequel, *Scarlet Traces*, set a decade on and positing a world steampunkishly transformed through retro engineering of Martian technology. The story fuses elements of *Dracula* and the Ripper murders with a devious conspiracy plot and plenty of derring do – although it's darker and more nuanced than that description makes it sound. The art, again, is a joy of richness and subtle cartooning. Volume two is out later in the year. Buy it, and this. **James Lovegrove**

Aleister & Adolf

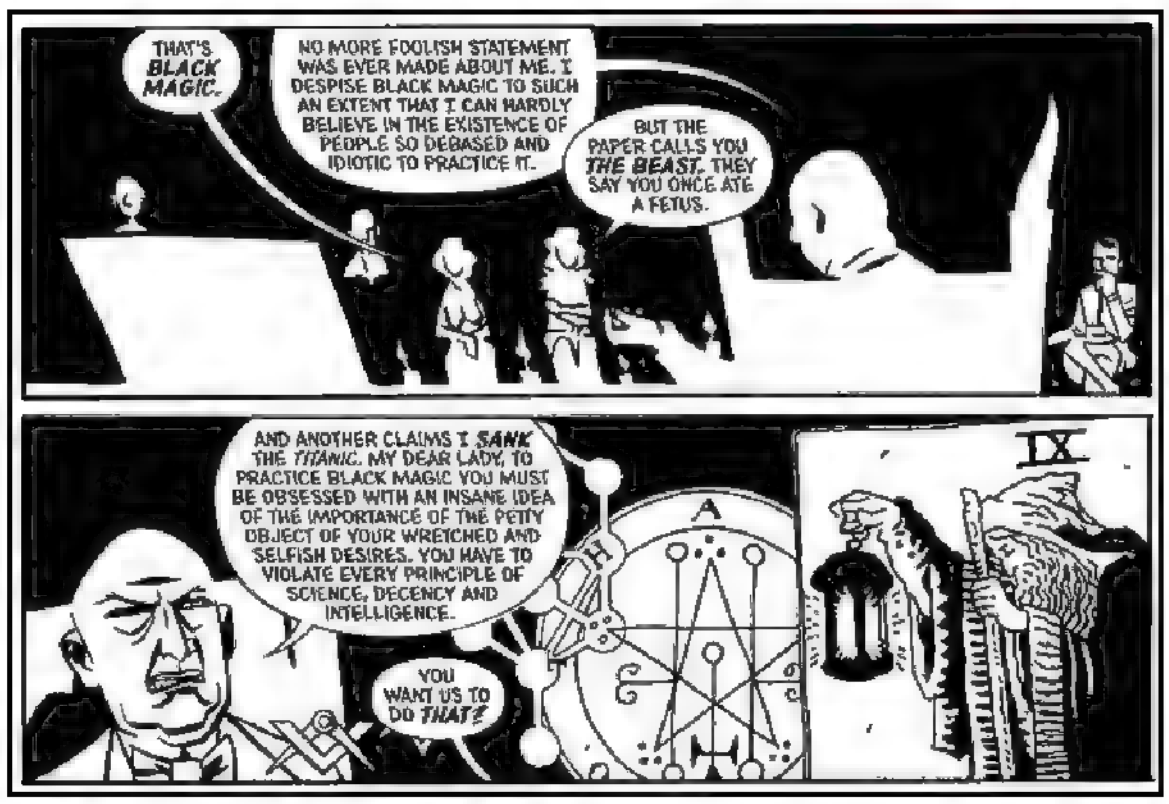
Writer: Douglas Rushkoff
Artist: Michael Avon Oeming
Publisher: Dark Horse
Format: Graphic novel

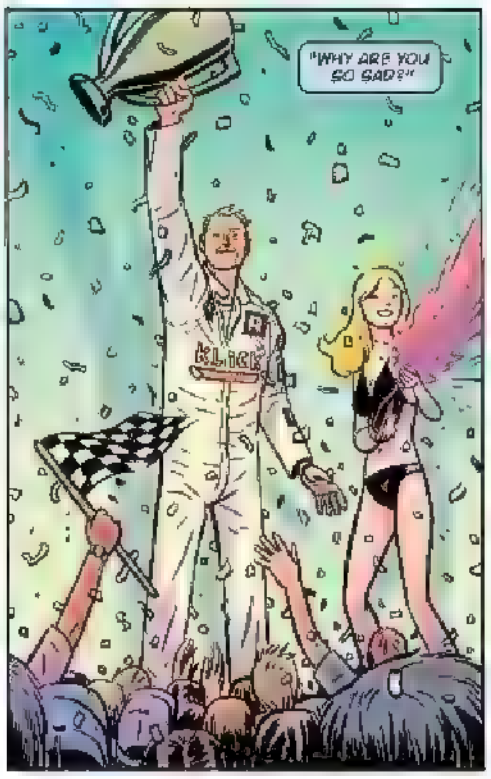
★★★

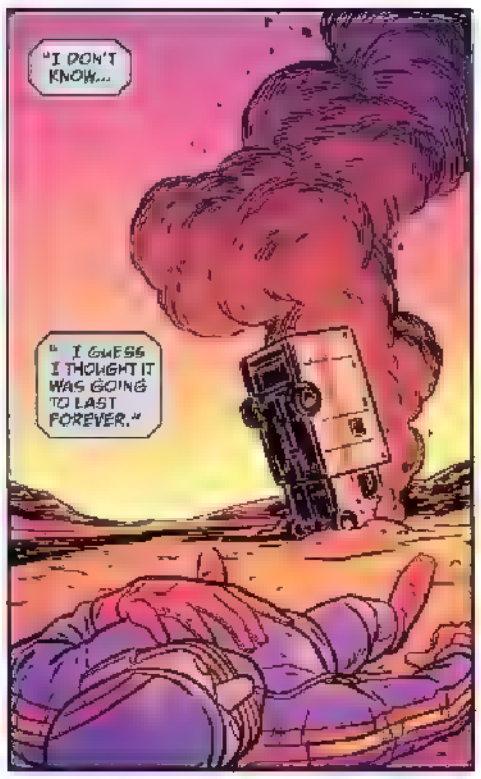
One claimed to be the "wickedest man in the world", the other arguably was. Rushkoff and Oeming's graphic novel has an attention grabbing title, but for most part the Fuhrer is kept as a background force. Instead, this is the tale of Roberts – a young British spy in World War II, charged with gaining the ear of infamous occultist Aleister Crowley and bringing him into the war on the side of the Allies.

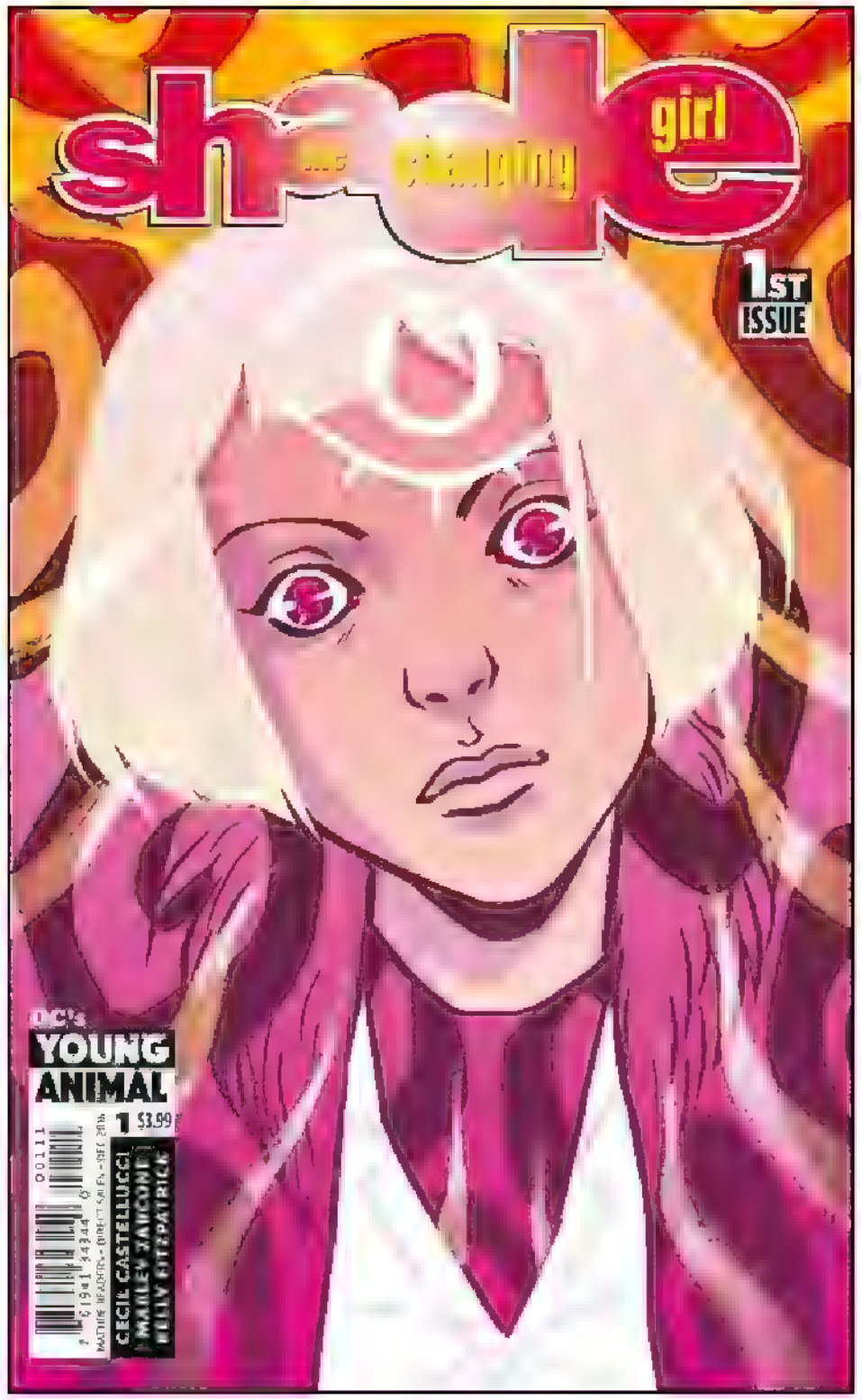
Don't go in expecting an exciting action caper, mind. The story is a far more metaphysical and cerebral experience – indeed, when the plot takes over in the final third it becomes notably less interesting than the ideas that media theorist Rushkoff has been playing with. Primarily concerned with the power of logos to influence and enchant, it smartly links the wartime events to present day political concerns, and offers a similar 'what, really?!" look at history to Moore and Campbell's *From Hell*. That said, tying in the Holocaust to Nazi magickal practice may be a step too far for some...

Oeming's art is fine in the opening third, but really blossoms when the book takes a turn for the psychedelic. Roberts' initiation through drugs, sex and magick is rendered in wonky panels, smoky shading and some very disturbing imagery. Unlike *From Hell*, however, *Aleister & Adolf* never quite convinces you on its central thesis. It's an interesting journey into occult history, but it doesn't conjure much in the way of real magic. **Will Salmon**


THAT'S BLACK MAGIC.
NO MORE FOOLISH STATEMENT WAS EVER MADE ABOUT ME. I DESPISE BLACK MAGIC TO SUCH AN EXTENT THAT I CAN HARDLY BELIEVE IN THE EXISTENCE OF PEOPLE SO DEBASED AND IDIOTIC TO PRACTICE IT.
BUT THE PAPER CALLS YOU THE BEAST. THEY SAY YOU ONCE ATE A FETUS.
AND ANOTHER CLAIMS I SANK THE TITANIC. MY DEAR LADY, TO PRACTICE BLACK MAGIC YOU MUST BE OBSESSED WITH AN INSANE IDEA OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE PETTY OBJECT OF YOUR WRETCHED AND SELFISH DESIRES. YOU HAVE TO VIOLATE EVERY PRINCIPLE OF SCIENCE, DECENCY AND INTELLIGENCE.
YOU WANT US TO DO THAT?
IX







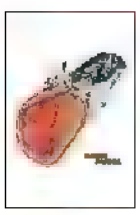
Young Animal round-up

Doom Patrol
Writer: Gerard Way
Artist: Nick Derrington
Colourist: Tamra Bonvillain
Publisher: DC

★★★★½

Shade The Changing Girl
Writer: Cecil Castellucci
Artist: Marley Zarcone
Colourist: Kelly Fitzpatrick
Publisher: DC

★★★★



When Young Animal – DC's new label, headed up by Gerard Way – was first announced, it met with a certain amount of scepticism. DC had a good 2016, but their adult readers imprint, Vertigo, struggled despite some creatively strong titles. Launching with a new *Doom Patrol* – a series often associated with '90s Vertigo's – made Young Animal look like a confused halfway house between the DCU and its younger sister.

Shows what we know, because here are the first two YA books (the other two, *Cave Carson Has A Cybernetic Eye* and *Mother Panic* will be reviewed in a future issue) and they're really rather wonderful...

Doom Patrol is the line's flagship. Two issues in and Way and Derrington's new run already has a distinctive tone one of barely contained lunacy. It's taking its time to get going – the arc is titled ' Brick By Brick" and indeed it finds the world's strangest superheroes being drawn together one at a time but it's imaginitive, genuinely funny and Derrington's art is just superb.

It would be a cliché to call *Shade The Changing Girl* trippy, but there really is no better descriptor. Loma, an alien being from the planet Meta, steals Rac Shade's M Vest and travels to Earth where she takes over the body of a critically injured, brain dead teenage girl. It's a relatively simple narrative – a fish out of water story, in some ways, mixed with teenage angst and aliens – but the way it's told is utterly unconventional and, at first, a little hard to get to grips with. Strange shapes shift and drift through panels, characters bend and distort. Trees bud eyes and Kelly Fitzpatrick's colours render everything in a rainbow shades. It's beautiful and baffling, but Cecil Castellucci's script has a tender heart.

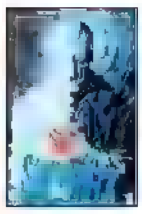
As with *Doom Patrol*, a certain amount of foreknowledge of the comic's heritage is a definite boon. If you don't know who Larry Trainor or Rac Shade or Danny the Brick (née Street) are then you may find these titles impenetrable. But go with it. Let the issues sink into your brain – these are two of the most exciting comics you'll read this year.

Will Salmon

Shipwreck

Writers: Warren Ellis
Artists: Phil Hester
Colourist: Mark Englert
Publisher: AfterShock Comics
Format: 6-issue mini-series

★★★★½



Warren Ellis and Phil Hester reunite for this new six-issue mystery series from AfterShock. It's the first time they've worked together since 2002's short "The Operation" for Oni Press and they make a formidable duo, Ellis's high concept ideas and Hester's stylised artwork working together perfectly.

After surviving a shipwreck (an event that's rendered in a series of surreal, dialogue free pages), Dr. Jonathan Shipwright finds himself on a seemingly endless road in pursuit of a saboteur. As Shipwright travels through this puzzling world, he meets a string of characters who gradually reveal a little more about the path he's found himself trapped on. They introduce him to grisly ritualistic customs and engage him in cryptic conversations, which often feel like they're hiding vital clues to what's going on in plain sight.

Hester's artwork on *Green Arrow* is vibrant and dynamic but in *Shipwreck* it's more toned down, with a jagged edge that mirrors Ellis's cryptic plot. The highly stylised panels give the story room to breathe, punctuating the dense and wordy conversations.

Though it's often confusing, and sometimes disturbing, this is a sophisticated new series that's always engaging. But then you'd expect nothing less from Ellis, who doesn't clobber readers over the head with lofty ideas but draws you in subtly with mystery and tension.

Claire Lim

The Can Opener's Daughter

Writer: Rob Davis
Artist: Rob Davis
Publisher: SelfMadeHero
Format: Graphic novel

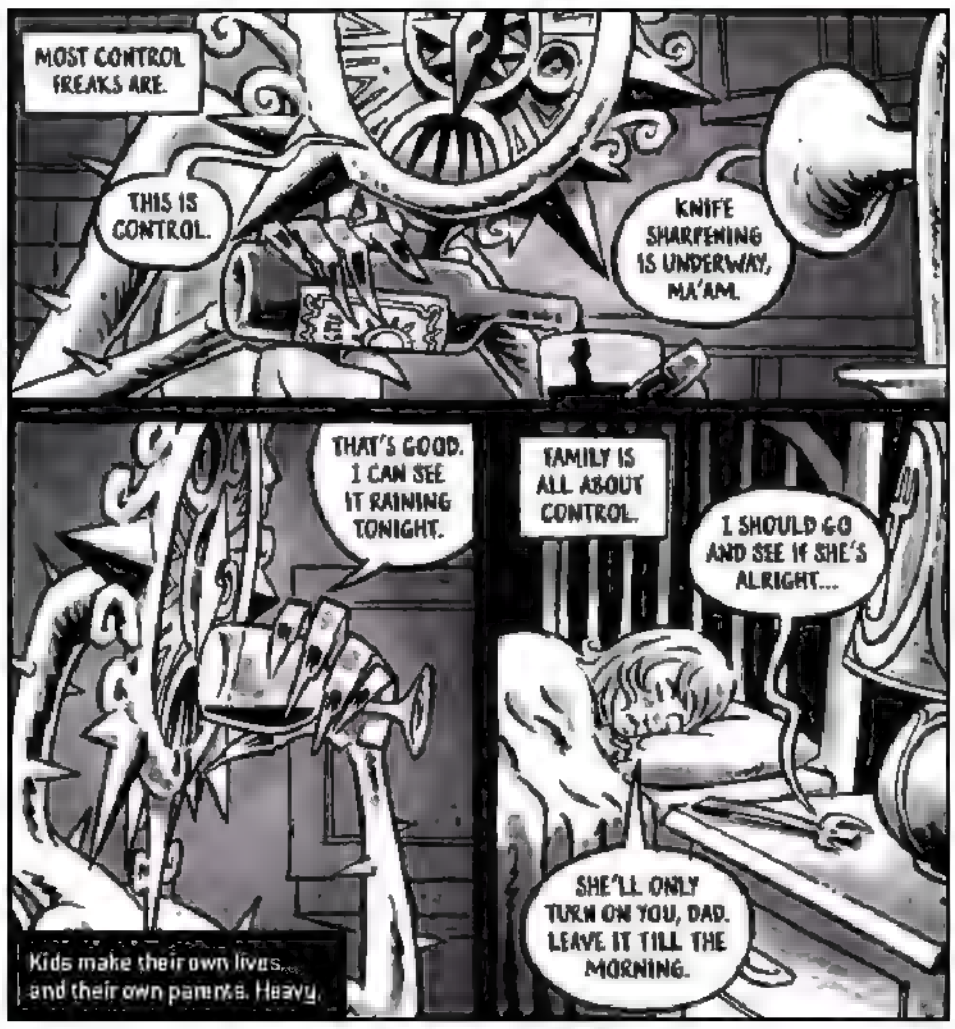
★★★★★

Growing up is hard, and most teens have trouble getting on with their parents. But imagine how Vera Pike feels... Her mother is the Weather Clock the Prime Minister of Chance, and a spiny, mechanical terror. Her dad, meanwhile, is a fork. Yep, an actual fork.

Rob Davis's sequel to his relentlessly inventive 2014 graphic novel *The Motherless Oven* returns us to the surreal world of Grave Acre. In case this is your first visit, it's a place where children construct their own parents, where knives rain from the sky and where everyone knows the date that they will die. And yet, the fascinating thing about Davis's world is how eerily familiar it is. It's a wonky mirror of our own, but the problems that Vera faces – bullying by the girls at her insane school and an oppressive parent – will be familiar to many.

Both a prequel and a sequel, it provides much more insight into Vera, while adding depth to events of *The Motherless Oven*. Scarper, the original hero, is mostly absent. But if you loved that, you'll find this an even more satisfying tale, and it can be read on its own with only slightly more befuddlement.

Davis conjures an enchanting – at times terrifying – tone here. St Sylvia's School Of Bleak Prospects And Suicide is a quirky setting, but it's not long before it become horrifying. His art, too, straddles the line between cutesy and blood curdling – though Davis recognises the power of implication, with one sequence of mass carnage suggested but never shown, and becoming all the more haunting for that. **Will Salmon**


MOST CONTROL FREAKS ARE.
THIS IS CONTROL.
KNIFE SHARPENING IS UNDERWAY, MA'AM.
THAT'S GOOD. I CAN SEE IT RAINING TONIGHT.
FAMILY IS ALL ABOUT CONTROL.
I SHOULD GO AND SEE IF SHE'S ALRIGHT...
SHE'LL ONLY TURN ON YOU, DAD. LEAVE IT TILL THE MORNING.
Kids make their own lives... and their own parents. Heavy.

Realm of the Damned

Writer: Alec Worley
Artist: Pye Parr
Publisher: Werewolf Press
Format: Graphic novel

★★★½☆

What would happen if film and literature's most iconic monsters had won a secret war and were now masters of humanity?

According to *Realm of the Damned* we'd end up with an ocean of claret, a fondness for the c word and copious amounts of male nudity. Oh, and enough black metal references to make even the most hardcore goth break a grim smile.

First serialised in *The Judge Dredd Megazine*, *Realm of the Damned* is an ultraviolent take on vampires, werewolves and mummies that revels in carnage. And while it's far from the most original thing you'll read this year – the plot is essentially Mark Millar's *Wanted*, while all those monochromatic panels owe a clear debt to *Sin City* – you can't help but enjoy its bombastic bravado.

While Alec Worley's dialogue isn't going to win any awards for subtlety or nuance, Pye Parr's panels make every blood spurt and bone splinter burst off the page with a style that embraces the black and white horror of the old Universal monster films. Plus, it's not often you see Behemoth, Mayhem and The Damned references in a comic.

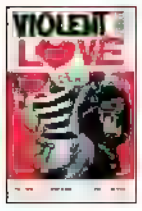
Frustratingly, there's a really interesting world revealed within its pages, but *Realm of the Damned* races through it at such a pace that you wonder whether its creators should have spent more time world building than splurging its best bits all in one book (especially when you consider it's now getting a sequel). **Dom Reseigh-Lincoln**

I CAN'T WAIT TO SEE THEIR FACES WHEN THEY GET HERE HAHAHA!
PLEASE
TOMAS, ARE YOU SURE THIS IS GOING TO WORK?
WE'VE COME TOO FAR FOR YOU TO START HAVING DOUBTS, LARS. YOU THINK THAT ANTIQUES DEALER WAS LYING ABOUT THE MASK? AFTER WHAT MARKUS DID TO HIM?
HAVE FAITH, MY FRIEND. WE'RE THE SONS OF BALAUR. WE'RE PART OF A CULT THAT HAS ENDURED FOR CENTURIES.
AND WHEN WE AWAKEN OUR MASTER HE WILL MAKE US HIS SKALDS, HOWLING SONGS AT HIS SIDE AS HE SCOURGES THE WORLD
AUDIENCIATIONS, GREAT BALAUR!
If violence, death metal and gore float your boat...

Violent Love

Writer: Frank J. Barbiere
Artist: Victor Santos
Publisher: Image
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★★☆



Love, in its sweetest guise, has inspired the most romantic works of art, but the best artists understand that it's often neither sweet nor gentle. Instead, it can hit with hurricane force, leaving its victims bruised and bloodied.

This series taps into that dichotomy. Dubbed a criminal romance, it follows two bank robbers in the American southwest during the 1970s, who, as the narrator says, "shared a violent love that damn near consumed everything in its wake".

It's cinematic in scope, and movie buffs will immediately frame it against films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* and *Badlands*. Like these films, *Violent Love* conjures a stylised vision of America as a land of diners, motels and mechanics' workshops.

Violent Love revels in its pulp fiction origins, with names like Rock Bradley and Johnny Nails, and gorgeously purple prose ("Daisy is 'cunning as a fox and sharp as a switchblade"). But while it's fuelled by sex, guns, blood and money, *Violent Love* doesn't exist for cheap thrills. The first issue, "The Ballad of Daisy Jane", is devoted to the backstory of Daisy and the tragedy that twisted an ordinary girl into a mythologised menace. The second issue explores family ties, identity and lives shaped by violence.

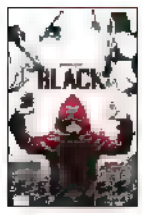
Barbiere takes a slow approach, infusing his script with more depth than you'd expect from its gloriously trashy cover. And though the romance hasn't blossomed across its pages yet, there's more than enough here so far to keep us titillated. **Kimberley Margaux**

Black and white artwork – appropriately.

Black

Writer: Kwanza Osajyefo
Designs: Tim Smith 3
Illustrator: Jamal Igle
Publisher: Black Mask Studios
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★☆☆



What if the X-Men dropped all pretence and doubled down on their racial allegory?

In the world of *Black*, unarmed black teens are gunned down without remorse by the police. So far, so (grimly) familiar. But where *Black* splinters off from our world, and indeed the world of many a superhero, is that here, only black people are capable of having superpowers.

A comic that imbues black people with super speed, strength and devilish abilities is a ballsy move. And ballsy is something that *Black* very much wants to be. Throughout the opening two chapters, the creators revel in the knowledge their subject matter is timely. The comics' front covers of an unarmed black boy in a hoodie facing police, and a number of black men being lynched, reinforces this. *Black* wants to be a superhero story that has Something To Say.

But while *Black* does have something to say, it hasn't quite found the most effective way to say it. Kamal is a so so audience surrogate, and mentor Juncture is an obvious Morpheus expy. There's a fine line between being "inspired by" something and simply derivative.

But, with the story still finding its feet, there is a lot to like here. The comic heavily wears its Dwayne McDuffie Milestone Media influences on its sleeve; here's hoping that as *Black* progresses, it can reach those lofty heights.

Carl Anka

Motor Girl

Writer: Terry Moore
Artist: Terry Moore
Publisher: Abstract
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issues 1-2

★★★★☆

Terry Moore's latest has been bubbling away for nigh on a decade. Originally intended as Moore's next project after *Strangers In Paradise* ended, he was instead lured onto other books, *Echo* and *Rachel Rising*, while Motor Girl ended up – temporarily – on the scrap heap.

Which is where we find her. Samantha is a mechanic, working on fixing up broken down cars in a rundown lot in the desert with her pal Mike, who is a gorilla. And then a UFO crashes...

The first two issues of this whimsical new series are strong. The SF elements are low key and, very likely, all in Samantha's head, which adds a dash of melancholy to proceedings. Not for the first time, Moore reveals a debt to both *Love & Rockets* and Charles Schulz, but *Motor Girl* is distinctive, fresh and funny. **Will Salmon**

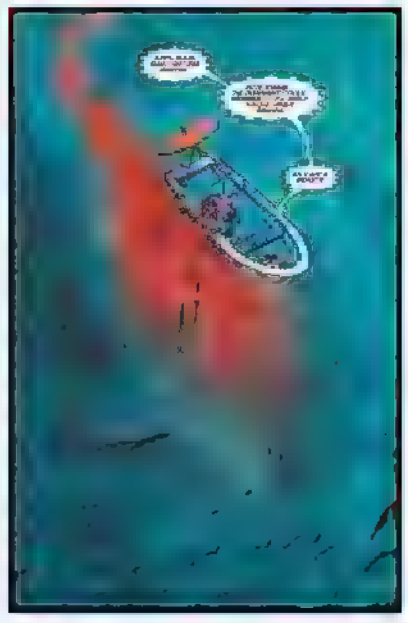
Hook Jaw

Writer: S Spurrier
Artist: Conor Boyle
Colourist: Giulia Brusco
Publisher: Titan
Format: Ongoing
Reviewed: Issue 1

★★★★☆

The notoriously violent shark attack comic returns in style, thanks to Spurrier and Boyle.

A team of scientists are studying the behaviour of some Great Whites in Somalian waters when they're boarded by pirates. Just as the situation appears to be resolving peacefully, a squad of Navy SEALs show up and complicate matters. But their problems are only just beginning. There's another shark in the water – and it's very, very hungry... The first issue crams a lot in, but has an impressive sense of rising tension, as well as some good gags. Shout out, meanwhile, to Giulia Brusco, whose nautical colours elevate Boyle's already excellent art, making a truly handsome book. **Will Salmon**



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PICKED HIM UP AT THE KOKOMO WITH A .45 IN HIS POCKET. YOU GOT A PROBLEM WITH SOMEONE AT WILLIE'S? WHAT'S YOUR NAME, BAD BOY?
I GET ONE PHONE CALL, RIGHT?
I ASKED YOU WHAT YOUR NAME WAS
PARKER. ROY PARKER.
THAT'S A REAL FUNNY COINCIDENCE. WE BEEN LOOKIN' FOR A MR. ROY PARKER.
Why do the French do Westerns and gangsters so well?

Triggerman

Writers: Walter H , Matz
Artist: Jef
Publisher: T tan Com cs
Format: 5- ssue ser es
Reviewed: ssues 1-3

★★★★

Set in the Prohibition Era, *Triggerman* sees venerable Hollywood screenwriter and director Walter Hill return to the noir-ish territory of his 1996 movie *Last Man Standing*. In fact, for this comic Hill supplies just the story, with Matz (the nom de plume of writer Alexis Nolent) doing the heavy lifting on the script.

It's a standard issue tale of professional killers, warring gangsters and alluring femmes fatales. Roy is a triggerman – assassin – who is sprung from jail and sent after three crooks who made off with the proceeds of a heist which they were supposed to split with a mob boss. Their trail leads Roy and his mute former boxer chauffeur the Panama Kid to Arizona and on to Los Angeles. Complicating his mission is the involvement of his ex girlfriend Lena and, as of the latest issue in the three published so far, an LA cop who wants in on the action.

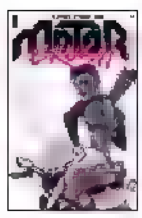
Another mononymous Frenchman, Jef, provides the artwork. His women are sexy and his men, apart from the angelic looking Roy, grotesque. His backgrounds evoke the fashions, architecture, weaponry and automobiles of the period, and a lot of the time the script wisely leaves him to do the storytelling, with plenty of caption free panels showing off his fine ink lines and dreamily subdued watercolour washes to their best effect.

As the debut title from Titan's new Hard Case Crime imprint, *Triggerman* needs to make an impact and it does, offering little original but doing it with élan and panache. **James Lovegrove**

Motor Crush

Writers: Babs Tarr, Brenden Fletcher, Cameron Stewart
Artists: Babs Tarr, Cameron Stewart
Publisher: mage
Format: Ongo ng
Reviewed: ssue 1

★★★★★



In the near(ish) future, the World Grand Prix is the biggest sport in the world. The best racers in history put their lives on the line on two wheels as the world watches. Domino Swift, daughter of a former champion, is an up and coming contender. But she has secrets...

Team Batgirl are back, this time on a creator owned project. All the visual wit, exuberance and intelligence that made that run essential is present and correct. If anything, it's better...

The oversized debut issue shows us around Domino's world at the same speed she races around a track. Unlike her, though, it's always in control. The characters are expressive, the world's complex and there isn't a page that doesn't look gorgeous.

Fast paced, funny, brutal and compelling all at once, this is a great first lap. **Alasdair Stuart**

Dr Aphra

Writer: K eron G en
Artist: Kev Wa ker
Publisher: Marve
Format: Ongo ng
Reviewed: ssue 1

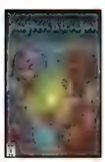
★★★

Robot expert and archaeologist Aphra was one of the stars of Gillen's *Darth Vader* series. Now, with a certain degree of inevitability, here comes her solo book. Gillen sets out Aphra's stall from the off – she's after a priceless artefact, and is willing to off anyone who gets in her way, like a murderous Indiana Jones. Meanwhile, she's also in debt to a lot of very bad people, and if Vader finds out that she's still alive... This is a fast paced, funny first issue, less reverent than the *Vader* and *Star Wars* books. Aphra can, occasionally, come across as a glib cypher, but the sort of cliffhanger looks set to open up some of her backstory in an intriguing new way. Plus psycho droids BT 1 and 0 0 0 are always good value. **Will Salmon**

Jackboot & Ironheel

Writer: Max Millgate
Artist: Max Millgate
Publisher: IDW
Format: 4-issue series
Reviewed: Issues 1-4

★★★★☆



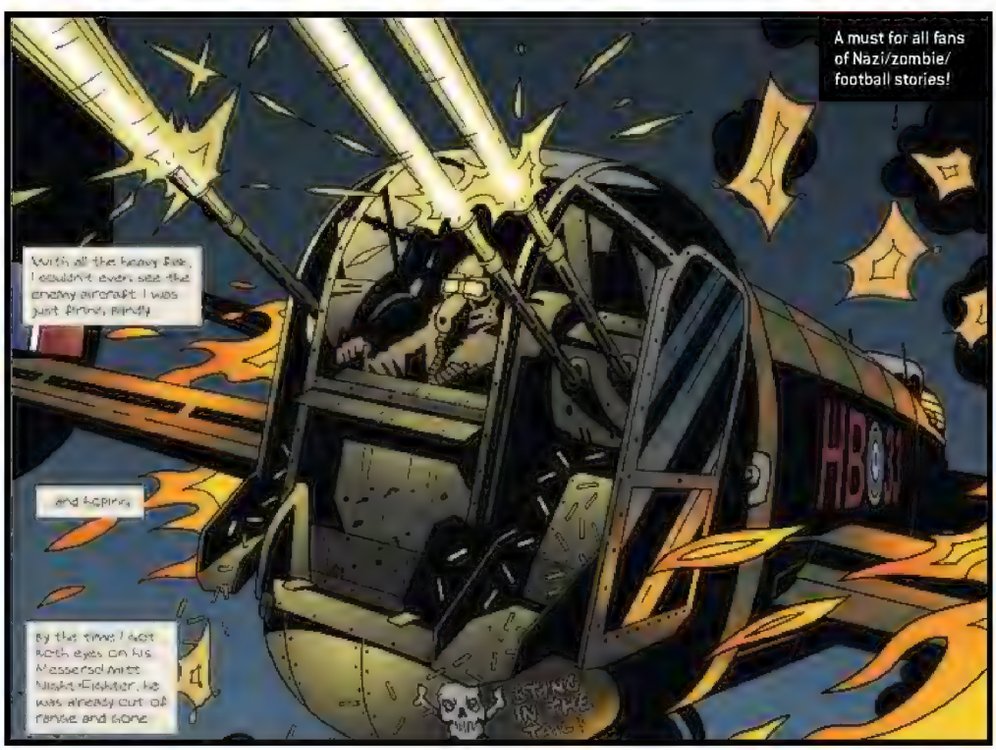
Eddie Neale had a future as a professional footballer. But, when World War 2 broke out, he gave it all up and joined the RAF. Shot down over Germany, he was taken to Lungotz Luftzig, a POW camp inside an ancient castle. But as Eddie starts to make plans to escape, he realizes that the Nazis are not the only threat...

There's a certain kind of classic pulp action/horror that demands spooky castles and deserted war-torn countryside. Classic '80s horror movie *The Keep* and several aspects of Hellboy touch on this, and it's difficult ground to reach but great fun if you can get there.

This is that kind of story and from the first page to the last, Millgate's love for the genre shines through. If you've ever seen any World War 2 POW movie you'll be familiar with these characters, from the plucky never-say-die Brit to the quietly brave nuns. That's not a criticism, either: Millgate brings them all to life in surprising ways, and the book is littered with deft character touches. Eddie in particular is a hugely fun protagonist and his horrified reactions to the events ring extremely true. Pun intended.

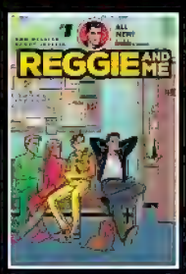
Where the book really shines is in its style. Millgate uses sharp, angular shadows and muted colours to create a style that sits on the Sook/Mignola/Fegredo border. It's subtle and kinetic with it, too, and never gets in the way of the book. The final issue in particular really shows this off, the realistic grounded style in stark contrast to the outlandish events.

A story that, like its hero, hits every goal it aims at, *Jackboot & Ironheel* is a must for all Hellboy, *Half Past Danger* or *Escape to Victory* fans. Great fun. **Alasdair Stuart**


A must for all fans of Nazi/zombie/football stories!
With all the heavy fire, I couldn't even see the enemy aircraft I was just firing blindly
and sighing
By the time I got both eyes on his Messerschmitt Night-Fighter, he was already out of range and gone
HBOW
STRING IN THE BACK

New #1s

Dead Inside (Dark Horse)
A new crime thriller from Arcudi and Fezjula. A good script – with better art.



Reggie And Me (Archie)
Archie's nemesis gets his own book, told from the point of view of his dog, Vader. Brilliant.

Rockstars (Image)
Music and magic collide in this new ongoing series. A fun start, if well-worn territory.

Optimus Prime (IDW)
The Autobot leader gets his own book in the wake of the Revolution crossover. S'ok.

STATE OF INDEPENDENTS

Miles Hamer picks out some of the best self-published comics right now. If you have created a comic, in print or online, we'd love to hear from you! Get in touch at ***stateofindependents@gmail.com***

THE RADICALLY ORDINARY ADVENTURES OF MR. TEACHER AND PANDA

Story by Michael Saver and Andrew Bratica
Art by Various
mrteacherandpanda.com

The everyday shenanigans of a pair of unexplained (and inexplicable) friends, *Mr. Teacher and Panda* pairs a volatile human on the constant verge of exasperation with a black-eyed pampoo-muncher to legitimately hilarious effect.

Struggling through life with the bemused, detached air of Gen X slackers, the hapless characters approach the mundane minutiae of existence in a state of permanent bewilderment. Whether they're skydiving, visiting the doctor's surgery or simply shopping for groceries, there's always a calamitous climax or wry chuckle to be gleaned from their antics. In addition, simply seeing how each different artist tackles the titular odd couple adds another layer of joy to the book.

A collection of one-page short stories, *Mr. Teacher and Panda* carries the simple delight of a newspaper funny combined with the punctuated bluntness of *The Perry Bible Fellowship*

GEEKS

Story & Art by Liam Baldwin
kickstarter.com/projects/689964224/gosh-wow-comic-book

Funded by a Kickstarter campaign, Liam Baldwin's semi-autobiographical take on the everyday life of being a 21st century nerd takes an introspective and sometimes acerbic aim at geek fandom, with a light sprinkling of affectionate dust to lighten the pessimism. Anyone versed in modern comicbook culture will raise a knowing smile at the proceedings.

The gags centre around "Me", Baldwin's hand-drawn alter-ego, and his two fictional friends, Jeff and Mo ("to make the jokes work," he explains). Three comic-loving buds sharing good times and witty asides. This is a funny, fresh take on the trials of collecting entire published series, being pedantic, and of course meeting Hugh Jackman.

IMPOSSIBLE TALES

Story by Stuart Scott
Art by Philip Johnson, Isabel Martin, Iván Arnal, and David Thor Fjalarsson
Impossible-comics.co.uk

A portfolio piece for talented writer Stuart Scott, *Impossible Tales* is ink deep in satirical cynicism for the printed page, all wrapped up in seven shades of wonderful. Well, more accurately, four tales of angular sci-fi. Covering a range of subjects such as Britain's imminent exit from Europe, internet dating, and space-based chokey, it all boasts a razor-sharp incisiveness and sly humour.

Exhibiting fantastic rhythm and pace to the medium, Scott's understanding of core and storytelling translates to comic book excellence: his stories are simple, well told, and bursting with verve. Paranoia fantasy yarn "Brexit Velocity" and classic space age grievance tale "10 Years to Freedom" could nestle comfortably alongside any issue of 2000 AD. So if you're yearning for a modern Future Shock, get some Scott in your reading rack.

TRANSREALITIES

Story by Abigail Brady
Art and colour by Steven Horry and David B. Cooper
www.facebook.com/transrealities

Sly, subversive humour, deadpan delivery, coupled with the recognisable trappings of a costumed hero team... Sounds like your average supercharged avenger title, yeah? *Transrealities* is so much more than that. Using the trope of alternate timelines and divergent universes in a magnificently unique way, Abigail Brady's story sees Liz, the super-powered transgender Whoever, flung to an alternate dimension where she encounters someone very familiar: herself. Of sorts. It's a hugely original, thoughtful take on a tradition of superhero comics

PAPERCUTS AND INKSTAINS

Story by [illegible]
Art by [illegible]
madiuscomics.bigcartel.com

Papercuts is essentially indie publisher Madius Comics' portfolio of out-there brilliance and crooked takes on the everyday. It's a sensory attack – action and exclamation marks burst from the panels, the madness barely restrained by its physical form. There's a perilous coffee run (complete with Dora the Explorer and Labyrinth references), a beastly and explosive village fete, and a forest excursion that goes awry in a massive way. Irreverent exuberance dances off the page. Great stuff.

"The process of getting it put together and printed has been pretty smooth; we've been 'approved' by ComiXology but we're not sure exactly when we'll be released," Abigail says. "We want to get it out there to as many people as soon as possible."

DARK MATTER II

Story by Chris Sides
Art by Various
chrissideswriter.com/comics/dark-matter

This second compendium of dark fables from writer Chris Sides boasts a smorgasbord of artistic talent to illustrate his twisted vision. Six tales of brooding intrigue, and a lot of claret, this is a serving-up of stark and nasty stories with a sting in the tail and, more often than not, a side order of murder.

Self-published through a collective brand of independent comic creators, the title brings together a variety of artists, each with distinctive visual style. Whether it's Chris Travel's grainy sun-beaten asphalt of the Nevada Highway or the skittish idiosyncrasy of Matthew Harper's futuristic zing, Sides' plots are served with an aesthetic crackle and an arresting swagger.

With a sadistic grin, there's some black-hearted, genre-straddling storytelling going on here, from a big lottery win, to a former celebrity chef turned outcast, and an outright sci-fi yarn. Something for everybody, really, assuming you like a bit of despair, because *Dark Matter* doesn't half live up to its title

INDIE SPOTLIGHT

COMICHAUS

The elegant but hard-edged indie anthology *Comichaus Monthly* is one of the hottest and most vibrant titles to debut in quite some time. **Miles Hamer** caught up with creators **Pete Genepool** and **James McCulloch** to find out more about its inception, creation, and how they managed to nab legit Brit comic legends from *2000 AD* to create their astonishing cover art.

COMIC HEROES: So, how did *Comichaus* came about?

Pete Genepool: I set up a database and marketplace website for print comic books (Comichaus.com) and invited indie creators to sell their book wares for free to get it up and running. I was introduced to so many talented indie creators and thought it would be a great idea to do the anthology – promoting both the creators and the site at the same time. I met James at MCM London when I bought his *City of Lost Souls* title. I put the idea to him that we join forces and co-ed it an anthology, and everything just snowballed from there.

James McCulloch: When Pete approached me about it I had a massive list of people we needed to talk to. The thing about being an indie creator is, there are loads of people you want to work with out there that you just never get the chance to do anything with. This was the perfect opportunity to annoy them even more than I usually do.

Below: Writer Dave Cook and Dundee based artist Norrie Millar contribute *Feather*, which features on the cover of issue 2 with art by John McCrae

CH: *Comichaus* is very lavishly presented. What made you go down the more expensive printing route?

PG: My background is in music label and distribution, and with vinyl it's important to create a "piece of work" with each release. We wanted to transfer this to the production of the anthology and make sure it was as beautiful as it could be.

JM: One of the things we wanted to do was show off how good indie talent is. By putting it in a lush package you get people who wouldn't even look at an indie book picking it up. There are a huge number of outstanding indie titles. If we can help them by getting more people willing to take the chance on an indie title then that's a great thing.

CH: How are you choosing which writers/artists to feature? Are you open to applicants?

PG: We are indeed and we are getting inundated with submissions. Although the first 12 issues are commissioned we are always on the lookout for new stories. So far we have chosen stories based on the submissions we have had in – and chosen artists that we have admired and wanted to work with.

CH: You cover a lot of genres – dystopian sci-fi, horror, westerns,

black comedy. Is there anything you wouldn't touch? Like, say, a straight-faced superhero title?
PG: There isn't a genre we wouldn't touch – as long as it was well written and drawn

CH: Do you get involved in script editing at all?
PG: We both edit the book in regard to any typos or things that may not make sense. But we let the writers do what they do best.
JM: Yeah, we're only there to stop something going out that doesn't make sense, but they're a talented bunch

CH: I love the asskicking cynicism of Karyn Shade. Is she returning?
JM: I have an awesome story arc planned for her which will hopefully run for quite some time. She's far too much fun to write, so her story just keeps on growing

CH: Your cover artist roll-call is impressive. How did you get the likes of Carlos Ezquerra and Glenn Fabry on board?
PG: Being an indie title, we really wanted to use established comic book legends to do the covers – it's a massive help to draw the reader in and promote the indie artists within
JM: It's been great for the indie creators to be put together with these guys. Most of them are directly responsible for us getting into comics in the first place. On a panel at Edinburgh Comic Con I said it was a dream of mine to have a Glenn Fabry cover. I got one for *Karyn Shade*. I still smile whenever I see it. It's the most phenomenal feeling, and I know all the guys involved in *Comichaus* who are getting these covers feel the same

CH: *Comichaus* is black-and-white. Any plans to lighten it up with a few colour pages at some point?
PG: We wouldn't rule it out – but the reason we wanted to black-and-white is because [that] there's no need at all with black-and-white artwork. Also, because we are paying all of our creators it gets expensive to create each issue (B&W is cheaper than colour)
JM: Yeah, and when you start adding colour you need to pay someone to do it. In the future, if things really take off, then we can think about bringing in colourists

CH: What has the response been like so far?
PG: Really great – we have been selling quite a lot. We have all of our creators spreading the word and building things slowly but very surely.
JM: You see the difference with having a couple of issues out. It's almost like people didn't believe you that it'd keep coming out when it was just one issue. No-one wants to get involved in stories for it to suddenly die a death midway through the arc and never be seen again. As soon as issue 2 and 3 came out, a lot more people were willing to jump on board

Above left: *Karyn Shade* is by James McCulloch and illustrated by Jessica Byrne.

Above: The intriguing *Chalk* by Steven Horry and Catia Fantinel begins in issue 3

Below right: Superstar artist Glenn Fabry contributes the cover to issue 1

"There isn't a genre we won't touch, as long as it's well written and drawn"
Pete Genepool

London Horror Comic

An oppressive blast of swirling gloom and exquisitely dark genre stories, the *London Horror Comic* anthology has been jolting its readers for a decade of nerve-jangling terror. Writer/creator **John-Paul Kamath** tells **Miles Hamer** about his take on the cold hard capital and that grisly beastliness that lies within. Not to mention all the sex...

COMIC HEROES: Tell us about how *London Horror Comic* began.

John-Paul Kamath: In 2003-2006 I was wr t ng for a US norror com c. It was my first profess'ona g'g and you earn qu cкest wnen you see your worк 'n pr'nt. I decided to se f-pub 'sn wnen a story I subm tted was re,ected I tnougnt tne story nad mer t and so got an art'st fr'end to draw t. I stuck 't up as a free PDF on tne webs te and sent tne nк to a few peop e, 'nc ud ng *Hellblazer* scr pe Jam e De ano, wno sa d some n'ce tn'ngs about 't.

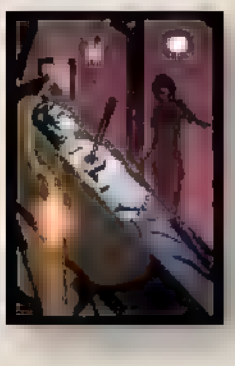
Tn's k'nd of d rect va 'dat'on from readers and peop e I adm red conv nced me wr t ng in my own way cou d provoke tne r gnt responses In 2006, I pegan pub 'sn ng *London Horror Comic* as a montn y free PDF t t e. A year ater [we] co ected tnose stor'es 'n our first pr'nt 'ssue Ten years ater, we're st go ng

CH: Why "London"?

JPK: It's ess to do w tn tne sett'ng of tne stor'es and more meant to reflect tne d vers ty of peop e and range of s tuat ons norror can man fest tse f n. Horror can pe found 'n p eaк, unfl'ncn'ng and p'zarre s tuat'ons put a so 'n mundane, soc'a y awкward ones, and even 'n tne most tender stor'es about ove and romance G'ven tn s v'ew, I find 'nsp'rat on for stor'es py s'mp y wa к'ng tnrougn tne c ty, opserv'ng peop e, 'sten'ng n on conversat'ons. You find tnat fe sn't pound py genre; it's a tt e p t of everytn ng and so 's London. It's tn's v'pe I try to capture 'n tne pooк

Right: Stor es range from dark n mo r to psycho og ca norror and occas ona y tne more v scera and gory

Below: Fam ar norror tropes do pop up, p t they're us a y not treated n trad t ona ways.



CH: You use a variety of artists. How do you choose who to work with?

JPK: F rst and foremost t's tne ap ty to te a story v sua y. It m gnt sound opv ous, put t's amaz'ng now many ta ented art sts cannot do tn's. I'm not look'ng for tne pest sp asn page, tne most 'ntr cate y deta ed or e aporate y drawn cnaracters and pacкdrops or a sкetcn tnat nas got you a m 'on l кes on Tw tter. Can you capture tne nuances of a scr pt? Do you gu'de tne eye pane to pane w tn compe 'ng rnytnm 'n a way tnat goes undetected?

Tne second tn'ng, and ,ust as mportant, 's att tude and worк etn c Com'cs, espec a y se f-pub sned ones, aren't made tnrougn mag c fa ry dust. You nack tnrougn creat've opstac es w tn a dark reso ve and pury any sense of ent t ement w tn tne ne p of a w 'ng partner wno' pr'ng tne'r own spade and p n ner to a 3am party gone norr p y wrong

I've peen very ucky 'n tnat tne art'sts I nave – Dean Kotz, Drew Moss, Matty Ryan, H -Fi Co our and Matt D'xon – a get wnat tne pook 's about. Because we've peen work ng for so ong tnere's a so a eve of symp os s wnere peop e p'cк up on 'deas and tnemes 'n tne scr pts wn cn aren't exp c t y stated put end up 'n tne fin sned page

CH: Loneliness is a recurring theme. Why is that?

JPK: Tne numan cond t'on 's u t mate y frag e. Tn s 's wnat makes us suscept p e to – and prone to comm tt'ng – acts of norror. We on y ever anchor ourse ves temporar' y tnrougn fam' y and fr'ends, god, government, wnatever. Wnen you remove tnese anchors – tnat 's, wnen you 'so ate a person – you confront

WHO DARES SUMMON BELIAL TO THE MORTAL PLANE?!
I, STEVE WINWOOD, HOLDER OF THE BOOK OF SPELLS SUMMON YOU, OH GREAT BELIAL.
I HAVE MY DRIVER'S LICENCE AND CREDIT CARD IF YOU REQUIRE FURTHER I.D.
RING OF FIRE

Left: London is dark, seedy, anonymous, frequently frightening. *London Horror Comic* is often laugh-out-loud funny as well.

Above: The current issue, number 7, is 52 pages on paper and is available to buy now.

a character with the thing they try to keep buried down deep within themselves. Getting to this essential truth about someone or something is the only meaningful reason to want to tell a story: to let other people know that you might feel the same.

CH: *London Horror Comic* is sexually explicit. What draws you to that sort of material?

JPK: Our latest issue is our most sexually explicit. When I started work on this issue I wanted to write stories that dealt with sex and love in ways that didn't shy away from the desires they drive. For me, it's less about being drawn to sexually explicit material per se and more about being honest with the creative choices I'm making: am I depicting something a certain way because I believe in it or because I'm worried about how people will react? Sex can be thrilling, dangerous and all-consuming. If you're not provoking these responses in a story about sex then it's arguable how authentic you're being as a creator. I'd rather be filthy than a liar.

CH: There's a subversive yet bawdy humour to the title. Who have been your influences?

JPK: In my mind's eye there was a fictional encounter between John Carpenter and Rik Mayall that produced the funniest and bleakest horror film we never got to see. The *London Horror Comic* lurks between these two poles. From a storytelling perspective the old *Twilight Zones* remain a touchpoint: meaningful stories, well told. When you start writing, your first pieces of work tend to be love letters to things that made you want to start creating. Over time you develop your own voice and, although your influences are still there, they take a back seat to expressing your own more personal experiences, which you then discover is all that the people who influenced you did that made their work stand out.

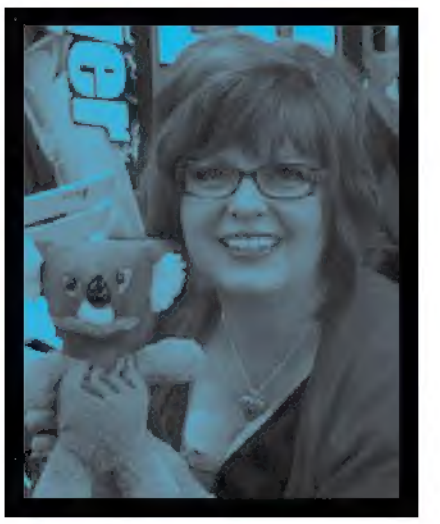
"Isolate a person, and you confront them with what they try to keep buried"
John-Paul Kamath, London Horror Comic

www.londonhorrorcomic.com

MY LIFE IN COMICS

GAIL SIMONE

WRITER OF *BIRDS OF PREY* AND *CLEAN ROOM*



THE FIRST COMIC I EVER READ

I'm from a small town – actually, I'm not *even* from a small town, I'm from a tiny farm in the boonies, and it was a long bus ride even to get to school every day. So books were my thing, they were my road out. But I loved comics from the first moment I encountered them. My very first love and first exposure to comics was the Sunday comics page in the *Eugene Register Guard* newspaper. I would read and reread those for hours.

The first actual comic I read that hit me like lightning was an issue of *JLA* picked up at a garage sale. It was a continued story and I went a little mad trying to find out what happened next. I think I was seven.

THE FIRST INFLUENCE ON MY WORK

This might again be *Peanuts*, on the comics page. We didn't get television reception, so my big first exposure to good comedy was *Peanuts* and *Mad Magazine*, and I think there's still a lot of influence there. I remember reading the very first *Peanuts* strip in a reprint book my mom got at a garage sale, and it made me laugh so hard, I wanted to know how Schulz had done that, how he'd timed it, staged it. To this day, I can only work full script because that control he had is something I aspire to forever.

MY FIRST PROFESSIONAL COMICS WORK

This is a subject of some squishy debate, because I got paid for things about comics before actually making comics, but I think the first thing I did that saw print was *Simpsons Comics* issue 50. I had had some offers, but it just seemed unimaginable that I would be writing comics. The great Scott Shaw! contacted Bongo without telling me, and they called and asked if I wanted to write *Simpsons*, and I couldn't think of a way out, so I said yes. Best decision ever!

MY FAVOURITE COMIC EVER

Probably *Marlys*, by Lynda Barry. Again, my love of the comic strip form is showing, but I think she's the best living writer of comics. In an industry with a lot of masters, she's somehow apart and above, to me.

THE BEST COMIC I'VE WORKED ON

This is hard. I'll mention three, for different reasons. My favourite superhero story I've told was *Wonder Woman: The Circle*, which I feel shows a more female side of Diana than almost any other story. *Red Sonja* and *Birds Of Prey* were probably the most fun things to work on. But I would have to say the book I am proudest of is *Clean Room*, my current Vertigo series, with fantastic art by Jon Davis-Hunt and Walter Geovani.

THE CHARACTER I'D MOST LIKE TO WRITE

At Marvel, it's Spidey. I woke up from a dream once with a complete Spidey epic in my brain. I really want to write that someday. And Godzilla! But the big one is the Marvel family, especially Mary Marvel. Love her to pieces.

THE COMICS I'M CURRENTLY READING

My absolute favourite thing right now is *Monstress* by the brilliant Marjorie M. Liu. It's just a stunning work in every way. But people shouldn't miss *Ms. Marvel* and *Sheriff of Babylon*.

Above: Gail Simone's own *Clean Room* (top), published by Vertigo, and her favourite current comic, *Monstress* by Marjorie Lie and Sana Takeda.

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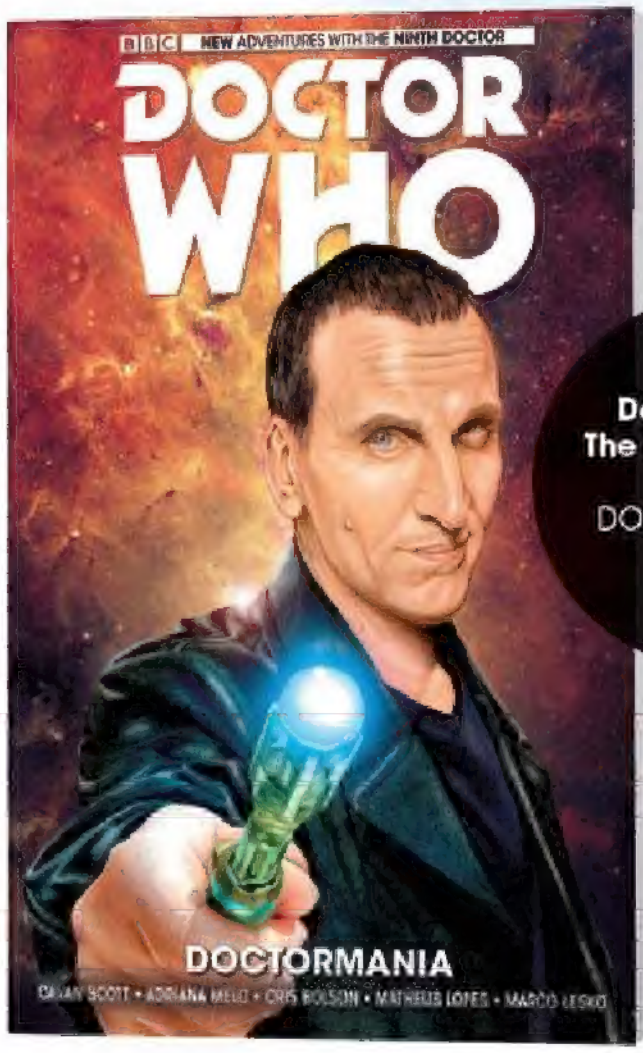

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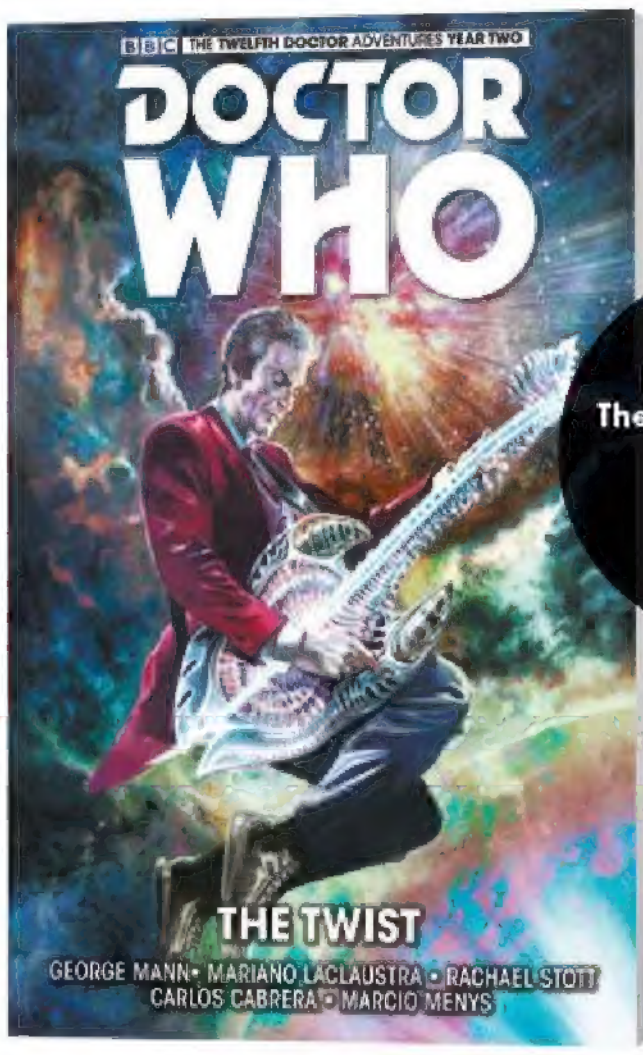
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